

Moral Anxiety in the ‘Land of the Pure’: Popular Justice and Anti-Blasphemy Violence in Pakistan

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Declaration

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Sana Ashraf

February 2019

*For Mashal Khan and many others who have
lost their lives after being accused of
blasphemy...*

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Abstract

In recent years, Pakistan has witnessed incidents such as lynching of a student on a university campus, torching of a Christian couple alive, attacks on entire neighbourhoods by angry mobs, and assassination of a governor upon allegations of blasphemy. This thesis begins with the premise that the anti-blasphemy violence is meaningful political action and locates it within the wider socio-cultural and historical context of Pakistan. I argue in this thesis that blasphemy accusations and the violence that often follows them are an outcome of the wider concern for maintaining purity at the national, communal, and individual levels.

The creation and the consolidation of the state of Pakistan has popularised certain ideas of national identity based on an imagined homogenous community defined by its purity. At the local level, the national identity is interpreted within specifically local cultural notions of sexual, ancestral, communal and religious purity. At an individual level, the concern for the purity of the self and the society has led to widespread moral and existential anxieties. It is within the context of these anxieties concerning the purity of the nation, the community, and the self that the blasphemy accusations gain traction.

By focusing on the inter-personal relationships between the accused and the accusers, this thesis contends that the accusations are triggered by perceived transgressions of social hierarchies and religio-cultural notions of purity among people known to each other. Through ethnographic examples, I demonstrate that most accusations are simultaneously motivated by religio-cultural ideals, emotions, and personal rivalries. However, once the blasphemy accusations have been made, regardless of the initial motives of the accusers, they quickly escalate into a shared religious concern inciting passionate responses from a much wider audience of believers living with anxieties concerning their faith, their religio-national identity, and the purity of their society. To the mobilised crowds, the accused becomes a symbolic figure, ‘the impure other’ who threatens the national, communal, and individual purity. The violent punishment of ‘the impure other’ that follows is however not inevitable; rather it is orchestrated and enabled by various actors motivated by both reason and passion.

Some of these actors are key proponents of ideas of popular justice. By promoting non-state punishments of alleged blasphemers, the agents of popular justice contest the state’s sole

authority over legitimate violence and its sovereignty in representing Islamic ideals. The thesis analyses blasphemy-related violence as political contestation through which the state's interpretation and implementation of justice is challenged by those competing with the state in the shared religio-political sphere. The state and non-state proponents of justice draw upon the same sources of legitimacy and sovereignty in claiming to represent Islamic principles of justice. Consequently, the assertions by proponents of non-state violence become enshrined in the state's foundations and its laws. This thesis thus reworks accepted analytical dichotomies of reason/emotion, culture/religion, traditional/Western, state/non-state and legal/extra-legal to extend our understanding of the upsurge of blasphemy related violence in Pakistan.

List of Abbreviations

AIML	All India Muslim League
FIR	First Information Report
JI	Jamaat-e-Islami
KNLF	Khatm-e-Nabuwwat Lawyers' Forum
PAT	Pakistan Awami Tehreek
PPC	Pakistan Penal Code
TLP	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan

Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	vi
List of Abbreviations	viii
Table of Contents	ix
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
Background and Context	3
What is Blasphemy in Pakistan?	4
The offence according to the state's legislature	4
The offence in public consciousness	6
Who are the Public?	11
Who is Accused?	13
The Symbolic Power of Blasphemy in Pakistan: Aims, Scope, and Theoretical Framework of Thesis	15
Instrumental Use of Blasphemy Laws against Vulnerable People	15
Freedom of Speech and Moral Injury	16
Beyond the State Law	20
Beyond the Reason-Emotion Dichotomy	22
Subjective and Structural Forms of Violence	23
Thesis Outline	25
Chapter 2 - Bravery or Treachery? Methodology, Positionality, and Politics of Knowledge Production	29
The Research	30
Research Sites	30
Research Participants	31
Research Methods	32
Positionality and Ethical Concerns	35
Ethics of Doing the Research	41
Ethics of Knowledge Production	45
Chapter 3 - Historical Roots of Anti-Blasphemy Violence in Pakistan: Formation of Self, Community and the State	47
Modernity, Reform Movements and Transformation of the Self	49
Nationalism, Religious Identity, and the Pakistan Movement	60
The Construction of Homogenous National Subjects and the Passion for Exclusivity	67
Conclusion	73
Chapter 4 - Religious Discourse Concerning Blasphemy: Politics of Uncertainty and Legitimacy	76
Affect, Meaning, and Power: An Integrative Approach	79
The Dominant Religious Discourse Concerning Blasphemy	82
Love for the Prophet Muhammad	84
'Religious Sources' Concerning the Punishment of Blasphemy in Popular Discourse	90
Blasphemy in Islamic Juristic Literature	94
Religious Authority and Construction of the Dominant Religious Discourse	97
The Ambivalence of Modernity: Absolutist Claims and Diffused Authority	97
Competing for Authority: Politics of Uncertainty and Legitimacy	100

Conclusion -----	106
Chapter 5 - Blasphemy Accusations: Purity, Moral anxiety, and The Enemy Within -----	109
The Accuser: Uncertainty, Moral Anxiety, and the Urge to Reform -----	110
The Transgression: Purity and Social Hierarchy -----	116
The Accused: Familiarity and The Enemy Within -----	128
Conclusion -----	132
Chapter 6 - Violence in the Making: Politics of Escalation from Accusations to Punishment -	135
The Process of Escalation -----	139
Seeking Fatwas: Authorisation of Violence -----	141
Reaching Out for Help: Opportunism and Mistrust -----	144
Mobilising the crowds: The Role of Mosques, Local Imams, and Religious Organisations ---	148
To Resist or to Flee? Agency in Powerlessness -----	152
Constrain or Condone: The Role of Police and Administrative Bodies -----	154
Lasting Hostilities and Wider Disturbances in the Social Fabric -----	157
Conclusion -----	160
Chapter 7 - Legitimate Punishment of Blasphemy: Contestation Between the State Legal System and Popular Justice -----	162
Contesting the State's Monopoly over 'Legitimate' Violence -----	164
What Gives Legitimacy to the State Laws? -----	165
Beyond Transcendence: Multiple Sovereignities -----	166
Ineffectiveness of the State's Legal System -----	167
Popular Justice: Legitimacy of the Non-State Violent Punishment of Blasphemers -----	173
Constructing Heroes through Glorifying Narratives -----	174
Staging Legitimacy: The Spectacle of Public Punishments -----	178
Conclusion -----	181
Chapter 8 - At the Nexus of State and Society: Continuities and Discontinuities Between the State's Legal System and Popular Justice -----	184
The Discourse of Lawyers: Reason, Passion, and Strategic Argumentation -----	185
Exceptional Circumstances, Ineffective State Laws, and Helpless Victims -----	189
Devotion, Passionate Love, and Intuitive Knowledge of the Heart -----	191
The Lawyers' Arguments Inside the Courts -----	197
Shifting Narratives of Lawyers: Strategic Argumentation -----	198
The Discourse of Judges: State Laws and Popular Justice -----	200
State Laws and the State's Monopoly over Violent Punishment -----	200
Religious Discourse and Popular Justice -----	202
Conclusion -----	208
Chapter 9 - Conclusion -----	211
Situating the Anti-Blasphemy Violence in Pakistan -----	211
The Way Forward -----	216
References -----	219
Appendix: Text of Offences Relating to Religion (Pakistan Penal Code, 1860) -----	237

List of Tables

Table 1: Frequently used Urdu terms in relation to the offence of blasphemy and their meanings.....6

Table 2: Distribution of persons accused and killed by religious identity in Pakistan (1987-2017).....14

List of Figures

Figure 1: The process of escalation from accusation to punishment -----	139
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

On 13 April 2017, I was in California for a conference titled *Public life of injury in South Asia* at Stanford University. I had flown in from Australia the day before and was going to present my paper on the public understanding of non-state violence against those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan the next day. As I sat in my Airbnb accommodation making some last-minute changes to my presentation and ruminating over the Stanford University campus that I had visited earlier that day, I heard the terrible news that would mark my memory of that trip forever. At another university campus, in the north of Pakistan, a 23-year old student had been lynched to death by his fellow students in broad daylight. Not only that, the lynching was filmed by the participants and the videos were circulating on social media. I watched one of the videos, despite the graphic content warning. The image of Mashal Khan's lifeless body being kicked, stoned, and lynched as the crowd cheered on and chanted slogans, made me forget about my presentation. I could not work any further, and I could not sleep that night.

Mashal Khan was a journalism student at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, Pakistan. He was lynched to death after allegations of 'publishing blasphemous content online' (Akbar 2017a). Just before the incident, the university had announced on its online notice board that Mashal Khan along with two other students was under investigation for 'blasphemous activities carried out' by them and was banned from entering the university premises (ibid.). A month earlier, the government had started to crack down on blasphemous content online following an order issued by the Islamabad High Court (Human Rights Watch 2017). However, nothing was reported to police prior to Mashal Khan's lynching. After the incident, some screenshots of Facebook comments from a profile with Mashal Khan's picture on display were circulated that were considered insulting towards the Prophet Muhammad and Islam. The Judicial Inquiry Committee that was formed after the incident found that the said profile did not belong to Mashal Khan and that no evidence of blasphemy was found against him (Firdous 2017). The committee also reported that Mashal Khan's murder was premeditated by leaders of the student union who were threatened by Khan's critique of the university's administration (ibid.). Khan had spoken up against the corruption within the university administration and highlighted the illegal activities carried out on campus in an interview given to a local TV channel only a few days before his lynching (Akbar 2017b). Thus, the judicial inquiry report concluded that Mashal Khan's murder was a result of

malicious intent and rivalry of his fellow students and university administration (Firdous 2017).

The findings of the judicial inquiry report in the case of Mashal Khan reflect what many analysts, academics, and human rights organisations have already pointed out: the instrumental use of the blasphemy laws of Pakistan to settle personal scores (e.g., Amnesty International 2016; Gregory 2012; Human Rights Watch 2018; Julius 2016; Siddique and Hayat 2008). However, in the case of Mashal Khan, the laws of the state concerning blasphemy were not even mobilised; instead, members of the public took it upon themselves to execute ‘justice’. If we ignore the state laws for the moment and look at blasphemy accusations themselves as means for settling personal scores, we need to explain why blasphemy accusations were chosen as *the method* by Mashal Khan’s rivals to get rid of him. One explanation that can be offered is that blasphemy accusations are an *effective method* to get rid of one’s rivals. Spreading rumors of blasphemy against Mashal Khan was indeed effective in mobilising a crowd big enough that 20 policemen present at the scene could not prevent the lynching (Akbar 2017a). It was efficacious in keeping the clerics from leading Mashal Khan’s funeral prayers and his neighbors from participating in his funeral (*Dawn News* 2017). It was also successful in ensuring that the perpetrators of lynching had support and were later hailed as heroes and lovers of the Prophet (Bibi 2018; H. Khan and Constable 2018). However, *what* rendered the blasphemy accusations effective, *what* enthused the crowd, *what* inhibited the local residents from participating in Khan’s funeral, and *what* led to glorification of the perpetrators of violence still remains unexplained. It is the power of blasphemy accusations to incite and exalt violence against the accused that I aim to address in this thesis.

Mashal Khan’s case is not the first or the last of its kind. There have been more than 1500 reported cases of blasphemy accusations and 75 incidents of non-state killings following blasphemy accusations between 1987 and 2017 (Ahmed 2018). The effectiveness of the blasphemy accusations in putting an end to the normal life of the accused, in glorifying perpetrators of violence, and permitting the disregard of the state’s courts of law when it comes to punishing the perpetrators of violence are all common trends in cases of blasphemy accusations (see e.g., Rumi 2018; Shakir 2015). Even if the accused manage to escape vigilante action, they spend the rest of their lives in hiding or languishing in prisons, afraid that anyone including the police responsible for looking after them may kill them at any point

(International Commission of Jurists 2015, 7). Some of the killers of those accused of blasphemy have been turned into saints, have shrines erected in their memory, and are revered by masses of their devotees (Hashim 2017b). Even if the perpetrators of non-state violence against those accused of blasphemy are tried and found guilty in the courts, they are glorified by large sections of the public (I. Khan 2011, 51-52; Philippon 2014, 290; Suleman 2018, 9). Even when the alleged blasphemers have been proved innocent in the courts, they are punished by the public (Amnesty International 2016, 42). There is thus a symbolic power associated with blasphemy accusations in Pakistan that is beyond the state laws, and it is this I seek to unpack in the present thesis. I aim to explore the meanings that blasphemy accusations and subsequent violent action hold for the perpetrators, their supporters, and the society in general. More specifically, I am looking for sources of legitimacy, authority, and morality that render blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence not only effective but also sacrosanct in the eyes of the people.

I argue that the blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence are not only strategic means used to achieve malicious ends, but also *meaningful* phenomena for the social actors involved. I further argue that the legitimacy of the meanings associated with blasphemy accusations and related violence is reflected in the state's legal framework *and in* wider narratives of popular justice. That is, the state of Pakistan is not the only authority that determines what blasphemy *is* and *how* it should be punished. The legitimacy and authority of the state is actively contested by non-state actors when it comes to appropriate punishment of blasphemy in Pakistan. I will demonstrate in this thesis how the ongoing contestation between the state and the society over authority and legitimacy concerning meanings and punishment of blasphemy lends symbolic power to the issue of blasphemy. I will also demonstrate how this symbolic power is harnessed within inter-personal relationships such that a wide range of transgressions—of social hierarchies and moral norms—are transformed into blasphemy accusations.

Background and Context

To begin, I would like to explicate some of the key concepts related to the topic of this thesis. I will start this section with an explanation of what it *means* to blaspheme for the state and for the wider public in Pakistan. I will then discuss who constitutes the public—the offended

party—and who are the offenders. This context is crucial to understanding the meanings associated with blasphemy and subsequent violence in Pakistan.

What is Blasphemy in Pakistan?

Blasphemy—the English term—does not correspond to any of the terms used for religious offences in the local languages. Neither is the word blasphemy used in the state’s legislature. However, it is used by lawyers in their discourse and by judges in their official judgements—because these are often in English, one of the official languages of the state. The word blasphemy is also commonly used by international media and human rights organisations, as well as by the English language media of Pakistan. Consequently, this word has become popular amongst the English-speaking sections of the Pakistani society as well. Nevertheless, given that there is no local term that accurately corresponds to the word blasphemy, we must ask: what exactly is this phenomenon being referred to when we say, ‘blasphemy in Pakistan’? In order to answer this question, I will look at two aspects of the problem: the offence according to the state’s legislature, and the public understandings of it. Although both the state and the non-state meanings of the phenomenon in contemporary Pakistan are claimed to be based on Islamic law, there are certain differences between the state’s legislature and the public meanings of the offence. The following discussion will highlight these differences. However, it should be noted that both the state and the non-state understandings of the offence are extensions of each other as the state’s legislature has evolved in response to public demands and has in turn shaped the public understanding.

The offence according to the state’s legislature

The offence according to the state law is enshrined in the Pakistan Penal Code (1860) under chapter XV, titled ‘Offences relating to religion’. This chapter comprises of sections 295 to 298; both sections 295 and 298 have three sub-sections each. Some of the clauses (295, 295-A, 296, 297, 298) were a part of the British colonial legislation. First codified in 1860, they were meant to control what were thought to be the emotional and irrational masses by Lord Macaulay (Ahmed 2009). Section 295 and sub-section 295-A prohibit *acts* of defiling places of worship and injuring religious feelings of any person belonging to any religion. Section 296 forbids disturbing religious assembly and section 297 criminalises trespassing of burial sites. Section 298 criminalises *words* that hurt religious feelings of others. These clauses were

aimed to prevent discord between different religious communities and are seen by analysts as a tool of governance devised to ‘reserve the right for the colonial state to demarcate and govern the boundaries’ between different social groups in the subcontinent (R. Saeed 2013, 245). Of these clauses, 295-A was added in 1927 in response to a major controversy after a Hindu publisher published a book allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad (Stephens 2014).

The rest of the clauses (295-B, 295-C, 298-A, 298-B, 298-C) were added after the creation of Pakistan by military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq between 1980 and 1986. These clauses are more specific and protect the religious feelings of Muslims exclusively. They prohibit defiling of the Holy Quran and use of derogatory remarks in respect of the Prophet Muhammad, his wives, family, companions and the first four Caliphs of Islam. The last two clauses (298-B and 298-C) categorically prohibit Ahmadis—who self-identify as Muslims—from calling themselves Muslims, using Muslim names and titles, using any of the Islamic practices, and propagating their faith. The earlier passages, inherited from the British legislation, had a consideration for *intent* to hurt religious feelings as a crucial component to them. The later clauses added by Zia-ul-Haq do not consider intent in punishing acts/words that may be deemed hurtful and insulting to Muslims. The amended legislation also prescribes much harsher punishments, including death penalty, for the offences described (see appendix for the full text of the clauses).

The original legislation was in English and the current Penal Code of Pakistan (PPC) is also in English because English remains one of the official languages of the state. The English words used in the legislation for the offence being discussed include injuring, defiling, insulting, desecrating, damaging, misusing, posing (as Muslims), outraging, and using derogatory remarks. Some of these words, for example, desecrating, do indeed overlap with the meanings of blasphemy according to the Oxford English Dictionary¹. Nonetheless, it appears that the phenomenon being talked about is not merely sacrilegious, it is also connected to the feelings and perceptions of people. Hurting their feelings or undermining

¹ Blasphemy in Oxford English Dictionary is defined as: “The action or offence of speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things; profane talk”.

their perceptions is as significant an offence, if not more, as hurting the Prophet or other Holy personages. The language of the state law, however, remains vague and does not clearly define *what* is deemed hurtful and insulting (Siddique and Hayat 2008, 359). To better understand the nature and definition of the offence under consideration, it is therefore pertinent to investigate the meanings people associate with it.

The offence in public consciousness

The Urdu terms associated with the offences referred to as ‘blasphemy’ offer some insights into the public understanding of these offences. I studied a range of sources—religious publications, sermons, political banners and pamphlets, statements of accusers and witnesses in the state’s courts—to trace words and phrases most commonly used to refer to the offences concerning religion and other related fields. These are the most recurrent words and phrases used by people: *Gustaakhi*, *bey-hurmati*, *tauheen-e-risaalat*, *namoos-e-risaalat*, *shaan-e-rasool*, *hurmat-e-rasool*, *ghayoor*, *ghairatmand*, and other derivatives of these terms (see table 1 for a summary of literal meanings)².

Table 1: Frequently used Urdu terms in relation to the offence of blasphemy and their meanings

Urdu Term	Meaning
<i>Gustaakhi</i>	Irreverence
<i>Bey-hurmati</i>	Sacrilege
<i>Tauheen-e-risaalat</i>	Insult to the Prophet
<i>Namoos-e-risaalat</i>	Honour of the Prophet
<i>Shaan-e-rasool</i>	Grace/pride of the Prophet
<i>Hurmat-e-rasool</i>	Sanctity of the Prophet
<i>Ghayoor/ghairatmand</i>	Honourable

These terms can be grouped into three broad categories. The first category (shaded green) contains words defining the offence: *Gustaakhi*, *Bey-Hurmati*, and *Tauheen-e-Risaalat*. These would be the closest terms in the local language to what I have been referring to as

² Translations of all foreign words in this thesis are my own unless otherwise specified. Translations of Urdu words and phrases used by others I quote in this thesis are also mine (presented inside parenthesis within the quotes).

‘blasphemy’. These three words are used in slightly different contexts: *Gustaakhi* is often committed against holy personalities, *bey-hurmati* is usually of physical objects and places considered holy³, and *tauheen-e-risaalat* is specifically the insult to the Prophet. Insult to God or to abstract ideas, such as sacred norms related to religion, do not form any specific categories (unlike the Western concept of blasphemy in which the immediate connotation is insult to God). This does not mean that the insult to God or to abstract ideas is not offensive; rather it is most often seen in terms of insult to either certain personalities (most importantly the Prophet) or sacred objects or places. There is a hierarchy of these insults/offences in the first category, the highest offence being the insult to the Prophet. Nevertheless, insult to other holy personalities and physical objects and places can be described as in effect an insult to the Prophet and this increases the intensity and seriousness of the offence. The second category of words (shaded blue) refers to what is at stake when the offence of *Tauheen-e-risaalat* is committed: the honour and sanctity of the Prophet. Again, other offences can very easily be framed as an attack on the honour of the Prophet; for example, sacrilege of Quran can be described as an offence against the honour of the Prophet because Quran was revealed to the Prophet. The third category of words (shaded yellow) refers to the honour of those faithful Muslims who safeguard holy personalities, the holy objects, and the holy Prophet by punishing the offenders. I will now discuss the specific connotations of each of these terms to understand the socio-cultural context of the offence.

Gustaakhi, *bey-hurmati*, *tauheen-e-risaalat* are the words most frequently used to refer to acts and words of disrespect or insult towards Islam and holy personalities of Islam. However, they all have very specific connotations. The word *gustaakhi* usually means irreverence, impudence, and insolence. It is most commonly used in the context of hierarchical relations. For example, a father is considered higher than his son and should be approached with certain reverence by his son. Any act or expression not conforming to the expected behaviour of a son towards a father will be termed *gustaakhi*. Given the context of hierarchical relations, *gustaakhi* is more a form of transgression than an insult. The one who commits *gustaakhi* is called *gustaakh*. Nevertheless, *Gustaakh-e-rasool* is a common word used to refer to those

³ The reverence of holy objects and places is a more South Asian phenomenon, expressed by South Asian Muslims like other religious communities in South Asia.

accused of ‘insulting’ the Prophet, *rasool* being the Urdu word for Prophet. I will demonstrate later in this thesis how various transgressions are framed as insult to the Prophet.

The term *bey-hurmati* is derived from the word *hurmat*, which means honour and dignity in common usage. The prefix *bey* is similar to English prefix ‘dis’; the term *bey-hurmati* thus means dishonour or disrespect. *Hurmat* is derived from the Arabic root *h-r-m*, which is considered one of the most ambiguous terms in Arabic (Marmon 1995, 6). Derivatives of this root have various meanings including ‘sacred’, ‘inviolable’, ‘forbidden’ and ‘taboo’ (ibid.). The words derived from *h-r-m* may also have rather disparate connotations; for example, they may refer to ‘unlawfulness’ as per Islamic law on the one hand and ‘veneration’ of sacred objects on the other (Schick 2010, 69). Thus, the root *h-r-m* refers to sacredness, honour, and respect on the one hand, and to forbidden and illegitimate acts according to Islamic moral principles on the other⁴. The term *hurmat* derived from this root has the connotations of sacredness, honour, and respect most commonly associated with it. *Bey-hurmati* thus means sacrilege, dishonour, and disrespect. Interestingly, *bey-hurmati* of a sacred or honoured entity (space or object) is often caused by approaching it without taking proper ritualistic procedures into account—for example, entering the house of god without ablution—or by crossing certain boundaries prescribed by various religious interpretations. Again, the underlying offence is a transgression of the perceived boundaries.

Tauheen means insult and *risaalat* means prophethood (of the Prophet Muhammad in this context). Thus, *tauheen-e-risaalat* means insult to the Prophet. As compared to *gustaakhi* and *bey-hurmati*, *tauheen* has a more direct connotation of insult. It is also the most commonly used of the three terms. However, it is used specifically in relation to the Prophet Muhammad. The term *tauheen-e-risaalat* evokes the strongest of emotions and hence is used to intensify an offence in public discourse even if the original offence is not an insult to the Prophet. The public political discourse concerning the issue of ‘blasphemy’ is centred around the personality of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet is thus central to the conception of what

⁴ The word *haram* derived from the root *h-r-m*, for example, is used for a man’s wives and other women of the household whose honour and respect must be protected (Schick 2010, 70), as well as for illicit and prohibited acts and foods, such as alcohol, pork, extra-marital sex, etc. (Adamec 2009). It is used to refer to women who are sexually allowed to a man (his wives, slave girls, etc.) and to women with whom sexual relations are prohibited (mother, sister, etc.) at the same time. It is used for the sacred sites, such as the house of Allah, Kaaba, in Mecca and for acts that are forbidden inside those sacred sites, such as shedding blood.

people refer to as ‘blasphemy’ in Pakistan, even though most of the offences are not directly against the Prophet. Together these three terms—*gustaakhi*, *bey-hurmati*, and *tauheen*—suggest that the offence being discussed is insult, disrespect, or dishonour of a revered personality, object, or order, as well as a transgression of the perceived boundaries and hierarchies.

Namoos-e-risaalat, *shaan-e-rasool*, and *hurmat-e-rasool* are the terms frequently used to refer to the honour, dignity, and respect of the Prophet Muhammad. I have already mentioned the meanings of *risaalat* (Prophethood of Muhammad) and *rasool* (the Prophet). *Namoos* means honour, *shaan* means dignity, grace, and pride, and *hurmat* also means honour and respect as already discussed. While the actual cases of offences relating to religion range from presumed disrespect of printed Arabic words on pamphlets and banners to misspelling the name of Muhammad, the public discourse is centred around the honour of the Prophet. My thesis will demonstrate the ways in which various forms of perceived insults and transgressions can be understood and portrayed as insults to the Prophet in effect. For example, an insult to the beard of a Muslim man can be described as an insult to the Prophet since the beard is a symbol associated with the Prophet. Thus, the actual accusations can be quite arbitrary but have the potential of being framed as an insult to the Prophet. Once framed as an insult to the Prophet, the severity and intensity of the offence is increased significantly, and the discourse is built around the honour of the Prophet.

Therefore, it is important to highlight the centrality of the honour of the Prophet as far as the popular meaning and discourse of blasphemy in the local language are concerned. Honour is an extremely important value in the South Asian culture in general, and even more so in the Punjabi culture where I conducted my research. Honour needs to be maintained, protected, and actively reemphasised to establish a man’s worth as honourable. A man’s honour is usually associated with the standing of the women of the house, and transgressions against one’s women are punished through several means, including honour killings of the transgressors. The underlying assumption is that an honourable man is supposed to protect his honour (which is associated with women’s sexuality in this case), and as a part of his duty to protect he must punish the transgressors. Protecting the honour of the Prophet, and punishing the transgressors and offenders of the Prophet, has a similar reasoning and value system behind it. Thus, it can be argued that the honour of the Prophet is in effect the honour of

Muslim men—associated with the Prophet as it is associated with women’s sexuality—that needs to be protected.

Ghayoor and *Ghairatmand* are two other terms frequently used in the context of religious offences. The word *ghayoor* refers to a person (usually a man) who has due concern for honour, who knows how to protect the honour and is capable of doing so. Hence, a *ghayoor* or *ghairatmand* (synonymous) man will go to any length to defend and emphasise his honour, which in this case is the honour of the prophet: *namoos-e-risaalat*, *shaan-e-rasool*, *hurmat-e-rasool*. The words *ghayoor* and *ghairatmand* are frequently used to mobilise people to punish the alleged transgressors, and to refer to those who have successfully done so. The usage of these words further indicates that it is the honour of the defenders that is under threat rather than the honour of the Prophet. Those who believe in punishing the ones who insult the Prophet do indeed proclaim that the Prophet does not need protection or defence but being his faithful and *ghayoor* followers it is the test of *their* faith whether they punish the transgressors or not. They believe that the Prophet is above the attacks and criticisms from the people, but as believers *their* loyalty to the Prophet requires affirmation by punishing the offenders.

This overview of the public discourse on blasphemy thus highlights two important principles that constitute the meaning and social reality of the phenomenon within the context of the local language: honour and transgression. Why, then, do I use the word ‘blasphemy’ in my thesis? Primarily, due to the limitations imposed by having to write my thesis in English language. However, if there was one particular word or term in the local language to describe the offence, I would have defined it first and then used it throughout the rest of my thesis. But that is not the case. There are multiple words and terms, each with their specific connotations. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, I choose to use the term blasphemy in my thesis, as it is the word conveniently understood in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, it should be understood within the context of local meanings I have discussed here. The word blasphemy in this thesis therefore means disrespect, dishonour, and transgression particularly in relation to sacred persons and things. These meanings, while they overlap with and are reflected in the state legislature, cannot be reduced to the same. They incorporate wider public understandings of morality which is centred around honour, symbolic social-physical boundaries and hierarchies.

The discussion of the public discourse further highlights that the public meanings associated with the offence are also vague and open to interpretation and manipulation—just like the legal definitions of the offence according to the state. Both aspects (state legislature and public meanings) remain imprecise as to *what* constitutes insult, disrespect, or transgression. The very vagueness of the state’s legislature as well as of public meanings of blasphemy forms the basis for ongoing contestation between the state and the public—and between various sections of the public—as to what can or cannot be deemed blasphemous. The open-endedness of the meanings of the offence also means that practically anything—from sexual transgressions to mere existence as a member of a minority community—can be framed as a religious offence. I will demonstrate this further with various examples throughout my thesis.

Who are the Public?

Who am I referring to by the word ‘public’ when I talk about the public consciousness or the public meanings of offence? It would be wrong to assume that all Pakistanis believe in the public meanings of blasphemy discussed above. It would also be wrong to assume that all Pakistanis support violent punishment of blasphemers. Who, then, is offended, and who believes in punishing the offenders? This question is hard to answer statistically, specifically for those who *do not* support the punishment of blasphemers because their lack of support can itself be construed as blasphemy by those who support—hence inducing silence on their behalf. We can get some clues about numbers of those who *do* support the ideas of offence and punishment of blasphemers and are politically active in their support. Most recent figures are from the 2018 general elections in Pakistan in which a political party specifically rallying for the cause of violently punishing blasphemers—Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)—emerged as the fifth-most popular party nationwide and third-most popular in Punjab (Election Commission of Pakistan 2018). The party bagged over 2.2 million votes out of roughly 50 million votes cast in the general election (FAFEN 2018).

The winning party of 2018 elections, PTI, also supported the punishment of blasphemers within Pakistan in the past and protested blasphemy in the international context within the first few weeks of their election (Barker 2018; Crisp and Farmer 2018). The former ruling party PMLN that was the runner up in the 2018 elections also supported punishments for blasphemy on various occasions (Zaidi 2017). This does not imply that all supporters of these political parties also support the punishment for blasphemy. However, it does indicate the

central importance of the issue of blasphemy in the popular consciousness of Pakistani people such that all major political parties *must* cater to this concern at some point—in one way or the other. I will discuss the politics of the issue of blasphemy in detail in chapter 4. For now, it suffices to say that there is significant public support for the punishment of blasphemers in Pakistan. It is also important to stress that this support is not limited to what some of the studies describe as radical, extremist, or militant religious groups in Pakistan (Forte 1994, 35; Hayee 2012, 51; Saiya 2016, 5). Instead, supporters of anti-blasphemy violence are also present in more moderate and progressive sections of the society.

However, different sections of the society support the punishment of blasphemers in different ways. There are those who support only state punishments for the accused. Others support state *and* non-state punishments. There are also those whose judgements vary on a case by case basis. Hence, there are varying levels of concern over blasphemy, and multiple positions amongst the supporters of punishment for blasphemers. Regardless, it is safe to suggest that most Pakistanis get offended with respect to their religion at some point, depending on their perception of what constitutes the threshold of offence, and most support retribution in one form or the other when that threshold is reached. My thesis is mostly concerned with those who support violent punishment of blasphemers, whether by the state or by non-state actors. However, my insights and arguments also reflect the wider Pakistani society who all share some concern for offences that can be construed as blasphemous and who would support some form of punishment upon hearing that a religious offence was committed.

Even though my thesis is mostly concerned with those who support violent punishment of alleged blasphemers in Pakistan, it must also be acknowledged that there is a growing number of people who sympathise with the accused and the victims of violence. Those who disagree with the violent punishment of the accused are certainly not as organised as the supporters of violent punishment but there are a significant number of voices. Like the supporters of violent punishment, the sympathisers of the victims of blasphemy-related violence are also present in all sections of society. I have had discussions with people from diverse backgrounds such as those with no formal education, housewives, taxi-drivers, lawyers, and university professors who condemn the violence against those accused of blasphemy. There are also local activists and organisations who are actively campaigning against the blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan. However, those who oppose violent action against the accused have never been able to mobilise in numbers comparable to those who have publicly demonstrated their support for

violent punishment of alleged blasphemers. Nonetheless, my emphasis in this thesis on those who support the anti-blasphemy violence should be seen within the context of a wider range of competing opinions on the issue.

Who is Accused?

As mentioned earlier, over 1500 cases of blasphemy accusations and 75 incidents of non-state killings following accusations have been reported between 1987 and 2017. To put these numbers in context, it is pertinent to point out that there were only 10 cases reported between 1927 and 1986 under the British legislation (*Dawn News* 2010). The number of accusations and incidents of violence have risen sharply since the amendments made to the law by General Zia-ul-Haq (Rumi 2018, 327). However, it should also be noted that these figures do not represent the actual number of incidents as there are many cases that are never reported or taken to the state's courts of law. The incidents of non-state violence against those accused of blasphemy have also risen since the amendments in law (*ibid.*). In fact, all the people killed after blasphemy accusations in Pakistan so far have been killed by non-state actors. While the state laws prescribe the death penalty for various offences related to religion, and the courts have sentenced several people to death, none have been executed by the state to date.

In terms of geographical distribution, 74 percent of all the reported cases have taken place in Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, holding 55 percent of the total population of Pakistan (Jacob 2018). However, notwithstanding its large population Punjab stands out as the most likely locus of blasphemy-related incidents. This is not surprising as Punjab is also the hub of most active religious organisations, particularly the Barelwis who are at the forefront of anti-blasphemy campaigns in Pakistan. Barelwis are the largest sub-sect of the majority Sunni Muslims in Pakistan, followed by Deobandis, Ahl-e-Hadith, and various other sub-sects of Sunni Muslims (Suleman 2018, 6). Of the 95 percent Muslim population of Pakistan, Sunni Muslims comprise somewhere between 75 to 80 percent of the Muslim population according to unofficial estimates; the remaining are mostly Shia Muslims (*ibid.*). Rivalries between sects and various groups within each sect are common and are often the basis of blasphemy accusations.

According to the most recent data collected by The Centre for Social Justice in Lahore, 46.48 percent of the 1549 cases of blasphemy reported between 1987 and 2017 were against

Muslims (Ahmed 2018). The data does not differentiate between different sects of Muslims, but my survey of individual cases suggests that minority sects, such as Shias, are more likely to be accused of blasphemy. Even rivalries between sub-sects, such as Barelwis and Deobandis, often lead to blasphemy accusations. More than 50 percent of all the cases are, however, against non-Muslims who form less than 5 percent of the total population of Pakistan. Christians, who form 1.5 to 1.59 percent of the total population of Pakistan, were accused in 15.4 percent of the total cases. The most striking figures, however, are for the Ahmadis who form roughly 0.25 percent of Pakistan's population but are accused in 33.31 percent of all the blasphemy cases in Pakistan (see table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of persons accused and killed by religious identity in Pakistan (1987-2017)

Religion	No. of total accused	Percentage of the total accused (1549)	No. of total killed	Percentage of the total killed (75)	Percentage of total population
Muslims	720	46.48%	39	52.00%	95-98%
Ahmadis	516	33.31%	9	12.00%	0.25%
Christians	238	15.36%	23	30.67%	1.5-1.59%
Hindus	31	2.00%	2	2.67%	1.6%
Others	44	2.84%	2	2.67%	Not Available

The data for non-state killings of the accused tells a slightly different story. While the Muslims are still the largest group forming 52 percent of all the accused killed so far, Christians and Ahmadis are 31 and 12 percent of the total number of reported killings respectively (see table 2). These numbers imply that while Ahmadis are most likely to be accused, Christians are more likely to be killed after blasphemy accusations. One potential explanation for this discrepancy may be that the Ahmadis generally belong to higher socio-economic sections of the society than Christians in Pakistan, which means that they have more resources available to escape vigilante action as compared to the Christians. Nevertheless, the figures presented so far indicate that religious minorities are disproportionately affected by blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan. Most studies of blasphemy in Pakistan have already observed these trends. In the next section, I will discuss some of the major arguments made by these studies and present my own theoretical position.

The Symbolic Power of Blasphemy in Pakistan: Aims, Scope, and Theoretical Framework of Thesis

The issue of blasphemy in Pakistan has received significant academic attention in the recent years. In this section, I aim to trace major trends in the existing literature and lay out my own theoretical framework for the rest of this thesis. I will start with literature specific to the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan and move to more general bodies of literature that are relevant to my topic.

Instrumental Use of Blasphemy Laws against Vulnerable People

As the numbers in the previous section indicate, certain minority groups are disproportionately affected by blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence. The discriminate use of blasphemy laws against religious minorities in Pakistan has been demonstrated—and argued against—by several existing studies of the issue. Many of these studies highlight flaws in the design of and procedural inadequacies associated with the state legislature, rendering both the form and function of the anti-blasphemy laws problematic (see e.g., Forte 1994; Gregory 2012; Jahangir and Jilani 2003; Julius 2016; Rumi 2018; Siddique and Hayat 2008) for such analyses. This body of literature shows that the design of legislation concerning blasphemy and associated legal procedures is inherently flawed as it does not take the intent of the accused into account. Moreover, due to lack of adequate safeguards, the laws lend themselves to abuse against the vulnerable in the society. The emphasis of the critique has been on the discriminatory nature of the laws, as well as their instrumentalisation to target certain sections of the society, particularly the religious minorities. The instrumental use of the blasphemy laws against vulnerable people is a valid issue; however, these studies largely fail to explain *why* certain groups are targeted by blasphemy accusations? And *why* accusations of blasphemy—and not of any other offence, for instance, adultery—are instrumentalised to settle personal scores?

There are some exceptions. For example, Rumi (2018) points to the identity of Pakistan as ‘an Islamic fortress pitted against the outsider-infidel’ and draws attention to national narratives that glorify past acts of violence against alleged blasphemers as enabling the present violence

in the name of blasphemy (334). In my thesis, I expand this argument to propose that certain religious minorities and groups are targeted by blasphemy accusations because they represent the face of the *other* and are perceived as a threat to the imaginations of the self, the community, and the state for Pakistani Muslims. There is a significant lack of literature that looks into micro-level, inter-personal dimensions of the issue to understand what leads people to accuse each other of blasphemy and engage in violent action. One noteworthy exception is Asad Ali Ahmed's ethnographic work in contemporary Pakistan in which he demonstrates how everyday conflicts between different sects—two sub-sects of Sunnis in his case study—find expression in the form of blasphemy accusations (Ahmed 2009). I take this project further by presenting more ethnographic examples of how various conflicts in everyday lives of people—that may not be religious in nature—lead to blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence. I propose that blasphemy accusations are chosen as *the method* by the individuals involved in accusations due to the symbolic power of blasphemy embedded in the prevalent religio-national narratives, as Rumi (2018) pointed out.

Freedom of Speech and Moral Injury

Another body of existing studies looks at the anti-blasphemy legislature of Pakistan within the context of international law. These studies discuss the (il)legitimacy of the anti-blasphemy laws of Pakistan with respect to the international legislature that is binding upon Pakistan (see e.g., Bohlander 2012; Dobras 2009; Hayee 2012; A. Khan 2015; Uddin 2011 on this aspect of the issue). The authors of these studies see freedom of expression as an inalienable right of every individual and assess the credibility of the limitations imposed upon individuals in the name of religion. They argue that the blasphemy laws of Pakistan violate the principles of universal human rights by allowing and promoting religious violence against the people. Asma T Uddin (2011), for example, argues that instead of justifying the use of blasphemy laws to silence dissent in maintaining public order, the state of Pakistan should take responsibility to confront and curtail the violent elements. She asserts that religion, like all other political and/or cultural ideologies, is open to criticism and thus critical views of religion should not be reprimanded as blasphemous. Similarly, Dobras (2009) opposes the stance of the state of Pakistan that 'Islamic law supersedes international human rights' (360) and that 'the freedom of speech and expression never justify offending religious feelings' (359). While arguing that it is the believer who merits the right to protection, not the religion

or belief itself, she relies heavily upon the element of 'intent' in any expression. Hence, she contends that 'punishing speech that involves no hateful intent violates freedom of expression' (356). Along similar lines, making a case for freedom of speech and human rights, Bohlander (2012) argues that blasphemy cases and trials in Pakistan constitute crimes against humanity.

The idea of freedom of speech as the basis for understanding blasphemy has been criticised, most strongly by Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad in their work on secularism in Western societies. Asad (2009) argued that the concept of freedom of speech is not neutral; rather it is a product of the specific historical developments in the Western political thought. He also suggested that those in power decide what is allowed under the gambit of 'freedom of speech' (54). Mahmood (2009), in her essay on Muslims' reactions to the Danish cartoons published in 2005, argued that the notion of freedom of speech dismisses the 'moral injury' experienced by the Muslims (70). She described this moral injury experienced by Muslims as emanating from 'the perception that one's being grounded as it is in a relationship of dependency with the Prophet, has been shaken' (ibid., 78). The perceived offence, she argued, was not against a religious commandment but 'against a structure of affect, a habitus, that feels wounded' (ibid.). I agree with Mahmood and Asad that the concept of freedom of speech is too reductive and West-centric to comprehend the issue of blasphemy. In fact, the notion of freedom of speech is even more problematic in the case of Pakistan because it assumes that those who are accused of blasphemy are punished for exercising their freedom of speech to criticise the religion of Islam, which is not true in most cases. As already mentioned, blasphemy accusations in Pakistan can be triggered by perceived transgressions that are not at all religious in nature, and even by the mere existence of some people as different. Furthermore, as Mahmood (2009) demonstrated, the idea of freedom of speech does not consider moral and affective dimensions that are crucial to understanding how blasphemy is perceived and the reactions it provokes.

Nonetheless, Mahmood and Asad's critiques also have their limitations when it comes to understanding the issue of blasphemy within the specific context of Pakistan. Mahmood (2009) herself noted that her argument concerned the majority-minority power relations in the European context (89). According to her, Muslims as a minority in European countries are understood through the normative lens specific to the Western religious and political thought. In the case of Pakistan, however, Muslims are a majority and have their sentiments recognised

and protected by the dominant political and legal structures. Therefore, I believe, the moral injury of the *minority* Muslim community in Europe cannot be equated to the moral injury of the *majority* Muslim community in Pakistan whose religious sentiments are also protected by the state laws. There is a different set of power relations in Pakistan in which the moral injury of Muslims is not a marginalised phenomenon; rather it is the dominant mode of social control against those who are different or deemed transgressive. Moreover, in most instances of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan, it is not the same essentialised religious ethos of the Muslims—as described by Mahmood—that is at stake. While the mobilisation for violent action against those accused of blasphemy indeed revolves around the personality of the Prophet Muhammad and invokes the specific ways of relating to the Prophet that Mahmood discussed, the initial accusations are triggered by a much wider and culturally specific moral framework.

My thesis will demonstrate how norms related to sexual behaviour, social hierarchy, and purity are all subsumed within this wider moral framework. Thus, while the ideas of moral injury and affective dimensions associated with this injury are extremely important to understanding the blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan, the moral system is not as bounded (connected to the Prophet) and universal (shared with Muslims across the globe) as Mahmood's work depicted. In fact, the moral framework of Pakistani Muslims within which the blasphemy accusations take place may be closer to the socio-cultural ethos of non-Muslim communities within South Asia than to Muslim communities around the world. Interestingly, as the discussion in chapter 4 will demonstrate, the proponents of anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan themselves demand for their sentiments to be recognised as belonging to a unique religious ethos as argued by Mahmood. Hence, I find that while Mahmood's argument aligns with the vocalised arguments of those who support anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan, it is not supported by the ethnographic details of individual incidents of accusations. My research shows that the blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are based on moral injury that corresponds to specific socio-cultural moral frameworks rather than a universal religious morality.

A more useful conception of 'moral threat' was offered by Hassner (2011) in his description of the hurt felt by Muslims in response to the Danish Cartoons (24). While Mahmood (2009) had located the moral injury experienced by Muslims in the distinct subjectivities enshrined in their Islamic ethos, Hassner (2011) described the same in more general terms of symbolic

boundaries such as purity/danger, and sacred/profane that are present in all societies and whose transgressions may be perceived as moral injury (29). The notion of symbolic boundaries encompasses social, cultural, religious, and political ideas that a group draws upon to distinguish itself from its *others*. From this point of view, any threat to the preconceived notions of the group identity (and its purity) can lead to moral injury of the group in question. Hassner used this theoretical framework to study Muslims' reactions to blasphemous cartoons at a macro level focussing on several Muslim countries. My thesis, on the other hand, focusses exclusively on the blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence within Pakistan. Nevertheless, I find the framework of symbolic boundaries useful in understanding blasphemy accusations in response to micro-transgressions within interpersonal relationships in Pakistan too. My thesis will demonstrate how the cultural notions of purity/impurity, sacred/profane and the social hierarchies/boundaries based on such symbolic structures enable the blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence to take place.

There are a few other issues with the literature discussed so far that I would like to address. First, there is an exclusive focus on the state laws in the literature concerning the instrumental use of 'blasphemy laws' as well as the studies looking at Pakistan's legislature within the context of international law. As already mentioned, many cases of blasphemy accusations are not even taken to the courts of law and all of the killings related to blasphemy have been carried out by non-state actors in Pakistan. Therefore, any study of the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan must go beyond the state legislature and its failures. Second, there seems to be a rift between instrumental use and moral/affective responses as explanations of anti-blasphemy violence. Literature that focuses on instrumental use of blasphemy largely ignores the aspects of moral outrage and affective dimensions of the conflict, and the studies focussing on moral injury or moral threat seem to exclude the possibility of instrumental use of blasphemy accusations. The instrumental use argument seems to be privileging *reason* whereas the moral injury argument locates the issue within the realm of *emotion*. Admittedly, these are two different bodies of literature dealing with two distinct contexts: the literature on the cases of blasphemy *within* Pakistan mostly looks at the instrumental use and the literature on the issue of blasphemy on a global level or within European context focusses on the moral injury of Muslims. Nevertheless, I believe that both reason and emotion—instrumental use and moral threat—are crucial to understanding the blasphemy accusations and related violence within Pakistan. I will now address the two points highlighted in this paragraph in more detail.

Beyond the State Law

The basic question that led me to write this thesis was whether the violence related to blasphemy accusations would stop if the state of Pakistan repeals its so-called blasphemy laws? Cases such as that of Mashal Khan suggest that the answer to the above question is no, and that blasphemy accusations and subsequent violent punishment have legitimacy beyond the laws of the state. The state's legal system is not the only, or even the superior, source of authority that legitimises punishment of those accused of blasphemy. Thus, in this thesis my premise is that the issue of blasphemy cannot be reduced to the state laws concerning blasphemy, as many studies I mentioned earlier tend to do. There are a few studies that have looked at the wider socio-political dimensions of the issue—beyond the laws of the state. For example, Hoffman (2014) analyses the role of social pressure and vigilantism in influencing the outcome of blasphemy cases in Pakistan. He sees the prevalence of violence and vigilantism as the 'extra-legal system of blasphemy law enforcement' (371). While he acknowledges and emphasises the role of vigilantism and 'extra-legal' action, he still sees these phenomena with reference to the blasphemy laws. In seeing the vigilante action as a mechanism of blasphemy law enforcement, he assumes that the law of the state is the foremost and ultimate source of authority and legitimacy of violence. Such analyses are based on a law-centric approach that takes the laws of the modern nation-state (a Western category) as the reference point to understand conflict in a society. This approach does not help us understand the wider legitimacy of the punishments of the alleged blasphemers delivered outside and beyond the law of the state.

Moving beyond the law-centric approaches, I aim to investigate the broader understandings of legitimacy, justice, and authority amongst the accusers, killers, their supporters, and wider society in Pakistan through the lens of *legal pluralism*. Legal pluralism is a theoretical paradigm based on the premise that any society has a multiplicity of forms of law present within it (Rouland and Planel 1994, 51). Theorists of legal pluralism have argued that Western legal system and the west-imposed/inspired legal systems of the nation-states around the world are not the only moral systems through which people govern and order their lives (Fitzpatrick 1983; Griffiths 1986). Legal anthropologists have also argued against the law-centric approaches to understand and engage with the diverse social-moral systems of people even if they belong to the same 'class of phenomena' as modern law (Pirie 2013, 7-9). Hence,

the legal system of the state is not the *only* system of authority, morality, and legitimacy in a society. There are usually multiple sources of morality and legitimacy within a society, which may coincide, overlap, contradict, or overtly clash with the state legal system at any point (Tamanaha 2001). From this perspective, the blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence against the accused in Pakistan must be seen as situated in a broader public domain of justice, morality, and legitimacy rather than the domain of the state laws. I argue that while the state laws reflect and extend the public morality concerning the issue of blasphemy, the latter cannot be reduced to state laws and legality.

Legal anthropologists have also criticised the exclusive use of the terms ‘law’ and ‘legal’ for the state’s systems of moral regulation as state-centric. For example, Hoebel (1954) argued for inclusion of non-state systems of moral regulation in the definition of law. According to him, a ‘social norm is legal if its neglect or infraction is regularly met, in threat or in fact, by the application of physical force by an individual or group possessing the socially recognised privilege of so acting’ (28). Other scholars, such as Woodman (1998), understand law as ‘a continuum which runs from the clearest forms of state law to the vaguest form of informal social control’ (45). According to these definitions, the punishment of alleged blasphemers by non-state actors would be considered legal and legitimate form of social control in the minds of the proponents of such punishments. While I agree that we should not limit our understanding of law and legality to that of the state, I also find all-encompassing definitions of law more obscuring than explanatory in understanding different positions, conflicts, and contestations of moral systems in a society. In my thesis, I deal with contestations, overlaps, and co-optations of multiple ideas of justice, legality, and legitimacy. Therefore, instead of describing all of these competing ideals as ‘law’, I will differentiate between different forms of legality as either *state* or *non-state*.

While legal pluralism is a helpful theoretical tool to understand the non-state violence against those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan, it is mainly a descriptive theory. That is, while it helps us understand the causes and motivations behind non-state violence without restricting our analysis to the state law, it does not suggest any resolution of the conflict between state and non-state ideals of justice. There has been a tendency in legal anthropology to idealise non-state justice systems to some extent—a position that assumes an inherent agreement of all the local people on what customary law is (Benda-Beckmann 2009, 50). However, as Harris (1996) argued, ‘it would be romantic to idealise local, customary morality and demonise state

law’ because custom is ambiguous, ‘on the one hand it represents the possibility of acts of violence against women, against ethnic minorities, against those whose actions have offended the local powerholders; on the other hand it invokes local values against an alien and imposing state’ (6). Similarly, as Benda-Beckmann (2009) highlighted, the customary or ‘folk law’ is often ‘the law of local elites and/or the senior male population’ (50). In the case of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan, the sanction of public morality applies to those who offend the local powerholders or religious elites. In such situations, ‘state law is the only defence of subordinate groups or individuals who transgress local moral norms and values’ and ‘the “rule of law” becomes a defence against tyranny’ (Harris 1996, 6). Hence, I use the theory of legal pluralism as a descriptive, but *not* normative framework. It is not to say that the non-state justice system is somehow worse—more violent—than the state’s legal system, but to emphasise that it is simply *another* manifestation of violence that is already enshrined in the state’s legal system in Pakistan. The state’s legal system reflects public morality insofar as it prescribes violent punishment for those accused of blasphemy, but it does not hold monopoly over identifying blasphemy and delivering those punishments. Therefore, while it is helpful to look at the state and the non-state sources of legitimacy and authority, I do not intend to endorse or idealise the existing situation of *legal pluralism* with respect to punishments of blasphemy in Pakistan.

Beyond the Reason-Emotion Dichotomy

As mentioned earlier, most studies locate the causes of blasphemy-related violence in either reason or emotion. It is either rational actors strategically choosing to instrumentalise blasphemy accusations to settle their personal scores or emotive actors driven by moral outrage. My research in Pakistan shows that in most cases of blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence, the actors are driven by both rational and emotive elements at the same time. There are some studies that incorporate both cognitive and emotive aspects in their analyses. For example, Blom (2008) interviewed protestors from an anti-Danish cartoon rally in Lahore in 2006 and wrote about the affective dimensions of their motivations. She suggested that we should look beyond the ‘emblematic figure of an outraged protestor’, what she called the stigmatised Muslim ‘rage boy’, to gain deeper understanding into individual subjectivities (Blom 2008, 1). She argued that participation in anti-blasphemy protests is driven by affect and emotion, cognitive understanding of the situation, and public

performance of emotions (ibid., 2). She has similar work on ‘outraged communities’ in the broader context of South Asia that describes ‘outrage’ as a ‘juncture between the moral and the emotional realm’ and argues that ‘instigating, staging, and managing this “righteous anger” is a crucial dimension’ in mobilisation around cultural symbols in South Asia (Blom and Jaoul 2008, 7-8). According to these arguments, affect (bodily or visceral responses), emotion (bodily responses imbued with meaning), cognition (thought processes used to make sense of the world), and morality (shared worldviews) are all inter-dependent. Dispelling the reason-emotion dichotomy, Blom and Jaoul write,

Some false dualisms certainly need to be clarified. The first dualism is the debatable opposition between emotions and reason, as if only one or the other could shape behaviour at any one time. This disjunction, inherited from the rational actor perspective, proves to be fragile, because ostensibly any rational calculus also implies a range of affects (13).

In the same vein, studies of collective violence in South Asia and beyond have argued that motivations of the participants lie simultaneously in the realms of emotion and reason. For example, Veena Das (1990) contended that communal violence is both highly organised and emotionally charged (25). Similarly, Tambiah (1996, 284) and Sidel (2006, 13) have demonstrated in their studies of ethnic and religious violence that the aggressors are usually motivated by strategic/instrumental goals and emotional attachments to cultural symbols at the same time. While these studies focus mostly on collective action, which is an important aspect of blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan, they do not deal with the inter-subjective experiences leading to blasphemy accusations and driving individuals to carry out punishments of alleged blasphemers. I find the notion that emotion and cognition are mutually constitutive helpful in understanding not only the collective violence but also the motivations of individual accusers and aggressors in cases of blasphemy in Pakistan. My thesis will demonstrate that elements of strategic/instrumental use and moral outrage can be found in most instances of blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence.

Subjective and Structural Forms of Violence

So far, I have focussed on individual subjectivities in the formation of violence. However, individual subjectivity—‘the felt interior experience of the person that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power’—is also embedded in the wider political and economic processes (Das and Kleinman 2000, 1). My thesis is built on the crucial premise

that violence is meaningful action within a socio-political domain. As Schröder and Schmidt (2001) argued, violence is ‘performed as well as imagined by reflexive, socially positioned human beings under specific historical conditions for concrete reasons’ (19). The performance of violence is necessitated, conditioned, and legitimised within the given structural constraints. Žižek (2008) argued that we are so engrossed in the immediacy of the ‘subjective violence’ (violence carried out by visible subjects) that we effectively ignore the violence inherent in the system, the violence that is not visible because it is *designed* to escape our eyes, the violence he calls ‘objective violence’ (9-15). Žižek thus described systemic or objective violence as one of the three types of violence he identified; the other two being subjective and symbolic. Schinkel (2013) also gave a similar classification of ‘regimes of violence’ which he called ‘trias violentiae’, namely, private, state, and structural violence. Both Žižek and Schinkel are concerned with violence inherent in the foundations of the state, in the all-encompassing systems such as capitalism and neo-liberalism, and its manifestations within the private/visible sphere.

The violence inherent in the ideology and foundation of the state of Pakistan, as well as within the existing structures of power at national and global level, is of crucial significance in understanding the violence related to blasphemy in the everyday lives of common people. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) argued that the violence of the everyday/ordinary is not entirely separate from the violence of the extraordinary; there is rather a continuum between its structural and everyday forms. Following this argument, I demonstrate in my thesis how the structural and the everyday forms of violence not only manifest in each other but also constantly construct each other in the case of blasphemy accusations and related violence in Pakistan. In order to do so, I focus on multiple locales of power and authority—the state, the religious leaders, the local power-holders, and the bearers of power in inter-subjective relationships. My thesis demonstrated how these locales of power are related to each other in a web of ideas, passions, and motives.

To sum up, in this thesis I take the premise that blasphemy-related violence is meaningful at both subjective and structural levels. At the subjective level, the immediate perpetrators of violence are driven by both emotion and reason. The subjective violence is embedded in culturally specific idioms and reflects inter-personal power relations at the same time. The legitimacy of the subjective meanings of violence is not confined to the state’s legal system; rather it is based on wider understandings of morality and justice. At the structural level, the

violence is a manifestation of the state's claims to represent public morality and shared religious ideals. It reflects the systemic construction of certain cultural, religious, and political identities as central to the project of the nation-state. It is also a consequence of larger forces of modernity, globalisation, and the neo-liberal world order. My thesis demonstrates how the subjective and the structural forms of violence enable and encourage each other.

The theories I have discussed so far guide my thoughts and arguments throughout this thesis. I borrow from the fields of anthropology of law, anthropology of emotions and affect, anthropology of violence and critical theory to construct my arguments. However, to limit myself to any of these disciplinary categories would be to reduce a complex phenomenon to only a few of its many dimensions. My thesis looks at collective action and motivational processes, escalation and resolution of conflict in the society, statecraft and discursive production of religio-political ideology, processes of self-making and community building, as well as the wider dynamics of global politics. This is indeed a massive task, as Skoggard and Waterson (2015) put it:

We anthropologists have probably set ourselves up for the impossible: to capture lived experience, emotionality, and perception; small and large-scale interactivity; intimacy; and sociality, power, politics, and ever-changing material conditions of social life without reducing one to the other (117).

However, it is this contextualisation and attention to interconnectedness of various aspects of a phenomenon that make the anthropological perspective valuable. Keeping that in mind, I aim to study the symbolic power of blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan and offer an anthropological perspective to the existing scholarship on the issue. My thesis, by no means, covers the entire breadth and complexity of the problem, but I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussions and provide more ethnographic material to build upon in future research.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into nine chapters including the Introduction (current chapter) and conclusion. The aim of the current chapter has been to introduce the problem, the aims, and the theoretical framework of the thesis.

In the second chapter, *Bravery or treachery? Methodology, positionality and politics of knowledge production*, I discuss when, where, with whom, and how the research for this thesis was conducted. I also discuss my own position as a researcher and how it affects my perspective, my research practice, and my arguments in this thesis. I then discuss ethical implications of my positionality for my research conduct and for the knowledge produced by this thesis. The aim of this chapter is to emphasise that my research and arguments are grounded within my personal experiences and hence my thesis is as much a story about myself as it is about my research participants.

The third chapter, *Historical roots of anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan: Formation of self, community and the state*, establishes the historical context necessary to understand the problem of blasphemy in contemporary Pakistan. I highlight the processes of self-making, community-making, and state-making—from pre-colonial times to the present-day Pakistan—that have led to the widespread uncertainties and moral anxieties amongst the Pakistani Muslims. The discussion deals with the concepts of modernity, nationalism, and globalisation, and their impact on shaping the popular consciousness in the Pakistani society. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the current issue of blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan is a product of specific historical-political contingencies.

The fourth chapter, *Religious discourse concerning blasphemy: politics of uncertainty and legitimacy*, highlights the prevalent religious discourse and politics that shape public morality around the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan. Through a study of religious publications, sermons, and my interviews with religious scholars, I demonstrate how the political competition over legitimacy and moral authority affects the positions of the religious scholars on the punishment of blasphemy. The discussion shows how the positions of religious scholars and politicians shape the public religious thought amidst widespread uncertainty and moral anxiety. The aim of this chapter is to unpack the religious aspect of the issue of blasphemy as it is the prime justification given by the proponents of violence against the accused.

In the fifth chapter, *Blasphemy accusations: Purity, moral anxiety, and the enemy within*, I shift the focus to micro-level interactions between people to demonstrate how everyday conflicts (religious or otherwise) lead to blasphemy accusations. Based on my ethnographic research, this chapter shows that most of the accusations—and subsequent violence—take

place amongst people who are already known to each other. I describe how familiarity and everyday interactions are crucial to understanding individual accusations. I also discuss the individual motivations behind accusations, arguing that they are rooted in personal insecurities, moral anxieties, and perceived transgressions within existing relationships. The aim of this chapter is to understand people's motivations—beyond personal rivalries—in accusing known others of blasphemy and examine the symbolic value of these accusations to those involved.

The sixth chapter, *Violence in the making: Politics of escalation from accusations to punishment*, explains how the accusations—once made—are transformed from inter-personal to communal conflict and how various actors contribute to the making of the violence. In most cases of violence against the accused, more people than the immediate accuser are involved. This chapter shows how the support is mobilised, and how the decisions of the key actors influence the outcome of the conflict. This chapter also illustrates how the discourse is transformed into a purely religious one after the accusations have been made regardless of the initial motivations. The aim of this chapter is to show that the accusations do not automatically—and inevitably—lead to violence and that various other actors in addition to the accuser determine the outcome of the conflict once it has escalated.

The seventh chapter, *Legitimate punishment of blasphemy: Contestation between the state legal system and popular justice*, is about the next step after the escalation: the punishment of alleged blasphemers. In this chapter I discuss how the state's claim to monopoly over legitimate violence is contested by narratives of popular justice when it comes to the punishment of alleged blasphemers. I highlight multiple sources of legitimacy drawn upon by the state and the narratives of popular justice. The discussion in this chapter demonstrates how multiple sources of legitimacy overlap and compete at the same time to establish the legitimacy of the appropriate punishment of a blasphemer. The aim of this chapter is to contest the popular understandings of legitimacy—associated with the state's legal system—and demonstrate that wider understandings of morality, justice, and authority determine the accepted ways of punishing those accused of blasphemy.

The eighth chapter, *At the nexus of the state and the society: Continuities and discontinuities between the state's legal system and popular justice*, is based on the discourse of two groups that lie at the nexus of the state and the society: lawyers and judges. I present my

ethnographic study of a specific group of lawyers who support both the state and non-state punishments of blasphemers. I discuss the sources of legitimacy these lawyers draw upon to construct coherent narratives in which the state and non-state punishments are not dissonant but exist on a continuum of legitimacy. I also discuss the discourse of the state judges to highlight how they construct the legitimacy of the state punishments of blasphemy while also endorsing narratives that glorify non-state punishments. This chapter shows that the state and non-state systems of justice are not entirely contradictory; rather they are extensions of each other. The aim of this chapter is to show how the state and the public morality shape each other and operate in a system of shared sovereignty in Pakistan.

In the final chapter (Conclusion) I bring together arguments from all the chapters and offer some general observations about the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan. The aim of the conclusion is to go beyond the ethnographic analyses made in this thesis, speculate on wider implications of my study for violence and moral conflict in societies. I end with a note on political implications of my research in the global context.

Chapter 2 - Bravery or Treachery? Methodology, Positionality, and Politics of Knowledge Production

Like most other PhD students, I have been asked about my research topic countless times over the past few years. Unlike most other PhD students, I am almost always greeted with the expression ‘Brave!’ upon telling people about my research topic. The people telling me that I am brave for researching blasphemy in Pakistan include academics and non-academics, Pakistanis and non-Pakistanis alike. These conversations are usually followed up with questions about *how* I did my research rather than about my findings. The process of doing the research for this thesis has indeed been quite daunting, but the biggest challenges I have faced in relation to my thesis are emotional rather than logistical. When people tell me that I am brave for doing this research they are usually thinking of risks to my (and some of my research participants’) safety, which is undoubtedly an important concern. Most of the methodological problems associated with my research were in fact due to the sensitive nature of my topic in Pakistan. However, the biggest emotional and ethical dilemma for me has been the fact that while some people call me ‘brave’, others have told me off for being a ‘traitor’ to my country and my religion. These people include some very close relations making it almost impossible for me to brush off the criticism and remain unaffected by it.

The real issue, however, is that I find both characterisations—brave and traitor—problematic. My relationship with my topic, the place and the people that are a part of my study, is a lot more complicated than that. I have never considered myself a warrior, or a saviour of the less fortunate in my country—which is what the term brave implies. Nor do I imagine myself as working against my country, religion, or culture. This thesis is a product of my complex emotional and ethical journey in which I have searched myself as much as I have searched other people in trying to find explanations for issues that have perplexed me for a long time. It is not merely an academic inquiry into a topic I find interesting, but also an important dimension of my life as I have *lived* it. This thesis, therefore, is partial representation of my topic based on *my* experiences. In this chapter, I will reflect on the methodological challenges posed by my research, the choices I made, and the dilemmas that remain unresolved. I will start by describing my fieldwork, then discuss my positionality as a researcher, and finally consider the ethical concerns that arise from my position in the field.

The Research

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted between March 2016 and February 2017. This was the second time I was in Pakistan to research the issue of blasphemy. Before this, I had conducted three months of fieldwork in 2014 for my Masters' thesis on the same topic. It was after those three months that I first realised I had hardly scratched the surface of an extremely complex issue and started building a PhD proposal while writing my Masters' dissertation. The three months of fieldwork for my Masters' thesis were also helpful in facilitating my re-entry into the field as a doctoral researcher. The connections and networks that I had developed in those three months made research for the current thesis possible. I will discuss my connections and networks—and how they helped me conduct this research—later in this chapter. But before that, I would like to describe *where* the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out.

Research Sites

I was based in Lahore for the entire duration of my research. Lahore, the capital of Punjab, is a metropolitan city with a population of 11.1 million according to the 2017 census (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2017). While Lahore is the second most populous city of Pakistan after Karachi, this city has seen the most cases of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan since 1987 (Jacob 2018). Lahore is a hub of religious organisations and political parties that have been actively engaged in campaigning against the alleged blasphemers. During my fieldwork, there were tens of protests, religious gatherings and conferences that took place in Lahore with the explicit aim of protecting the honor of the Prophet and punishing the blasphemers. Lahore has multiple shrines central to the religious beliefs and practices of the Barelwis who are most active in anti-blasphemy activities and campaigns. Most of the Muslim population in Lahore also belongs to the Barelwi sect of Sunni Islam according to unofficial estimates. The state does not identify sectarian affiliations in the official census (Ramzan 2015). Moreover, Lahore has a host of NGOs and other civil society organisations that have been at the forefront of advocacy and relief activities for those affected by blasphemy accusations. Lahore's session and high courts hear multiple cases of blasphemy every day. For all these reasons, I chose Lahore as the primary site of my research. It was also convenient for me because I lived in Lahore for four years during my undergraduate studies and my parents also

live in Lahore now. Thus, it was a familiar city with friends and family located there who were of crucial significance in making my fieldwork emotionally and practically viable.

Despite Lahore being the primary site of my research, I describe my research as multi-sited for two reasons. First, within Lahore, I was constantly moving between different spaces including NGO offices, houses and neighborhoods of those affected by blasphemy accusations, courts, shrines, and religious centers. Given that these spaces are quite different to each other and are often contradictory in what they represent, I find it more useful to see them as multiple sites rather than parts of the same big site—the city of Lahore. Second, while based in Lahore, I also visited other towns and cities within Punjab and Islamabad Capital Territory to follow certain cases, meet certain people, and see certain places (for example, the shrine of Mumtaz Qadri in Bara Kahu, Islamabad). The towns and cities that I visited to understand and follow specific cases include Gujrat, Bhera, Jehlum, Mandi Bahauddin, and Rawalpindi.

Research Participants

Multiple field sites of my research meant that my research participants were also quite varied and often belonged to opposing groups—of those who supported punishment of blasphemers and those who did not. On the one hand, I conducted my research with people who were accused of blasphemy (regardless of whether the case was taken to the state’s legal system or not), their lawyers, their families, friends, and neighbors, activists, social workers and NGO professionals, journalists, some government and police officers. On the other hand, my research participants include the accusers, their friends/supporters/witnesses, their lawyers, religious clerics, scholars, and members of religious parties who either supported specific cases or wrote/preached/campaigned against the blasphemers in general. Apart from these clearly identified ‘research participants’, my analysis and insights are also drawn from my experiences and interactions while growing up and living in Pakistan for most of my life. These insights are based on my interactions with my own family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, acquaintances, and many other people I have learnt from in my life. Sometimes even brief conversations with taxi drivers, shopkeepers, etc. provided a window on the sensibilities of certain sections of Pakistani society.

However, as Ceja-Zamarripa (2007) asked, ‘what does it mean to anthropology that the anthropologist’s whole life could be characterized as one continuous participant-observation?’ (11). There has been a tendency in traditional anthropology to draw absolute distinctions between experiences of *living in a society* and *doing the fieldwork* such that the former is not an accepted basis of knowledge. However, these distinctions have been challenged, as Gupta and Ferguson (1997) write:

A discipline in which "experience" is so central has been surprisingly unfriendly to the notion that "experience" is constantly reconfigured by memory. If an anthropologist can "write up" an ethnography based on data collected during doctoral fieldwork twenty or thirty years ago, why should it not be possible for "natives" to "write up" an ethnography based on their lives? In what sense might we think of one's "background"-growing up, as it were, in "the field"-as a kind of extended participant observation? (32).

In my research, I find it impossible to separate the insights I have gained through explicitly *doing the fieldwork* from those I gained by *living* in the Pakistani society for an extended period. I draw on these insights to make sense of the knowledge I gained during my fieldwork. Due to lack of consent, I do not use information from all those casual interactions while living in Pakistan directly in my thesis; that is, I do not quote them or use specific information provided by them. However, at a broader level, I realise that the pool of my research participants is much larger than those who appear in this thesis.

Research Methods

Ethnography is understood as the classic methodology of anthropology, traditionally defined as a prolonged period of research in which the researcher lives with and observes a community closely to understand their point of view (Spradley 1980, 3). Since the 1980s, however, anthropologists have questioned the traditional understandings of a defined field and a bounded community as the objects of ethnographic research (Appadurai 1990; Clifford 1997; Marcus 1996). The critique has pointed out that the field is no longer a fixed locality due to its changing nature in the globalised world. It has also been argued that the traditional notion of ethnography creates false dichotomies such as home vs. field and insider vs. outsider (see e.g., Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Hastrup and Olwig 1997). The ethnographic field is thus no longer seen as a fixed site but as a set of ‘shifting locations’ defined by the topic of interest (Clifford 1997).

Given the shifting locations and relations in my research, I used the methodology of multi-sited ethnographic research, developed in response to the critique of traditional ethnography. The earliest concepts of multi-sited ethnography emerged in 1986 with *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and were later developed into a more elaborate theory of multi-sited research by Marcus (1995). According to this theory, the researcher follows ideas, people, narratives, connections, and objects in time and place. The multi-sited ethnography is ‘designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact define the argument of the ethnography’ (Marcus 1995, 105). I find this approach most suited to the nature of my research.

Adopting multi-sited research methods, I followed cases, stories, and people as I moved between different groups and circles of people. There were two major concerns that guided my way as I went around doing my research: the logic of my topic and the safety of my participants and myself. In terms of the logic of my topic, I wanted to understand perspectives of various parties in the conflict, and how they were opposed but connected to each other. The lack of significant ethnographic work on the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan meant that there was a lot of potential in almost every dimension of the topic. Each of my ‘sites’ could have been a focus for the whole dissertation in itself: the courtrooms, the NGOs, the neighborhoods, the shrines, and so on. However, I was guided by my curiosity to gain a broader understanding of the issue by studying its multiple aspects. On the flip side, it required sacrificing the depth of each aspect to some extent. But at this stage in my research, it made more sense to get a wider understanding of the issue; future research by me and other researchers can delve deeper into each of the dimensions.

The second concern that guided my movement through the field was safety. Spending too much time with the accused and their families—specifically those who were living in hiding—could have compromised their and possibly my own safety. On the other hand, there were groups and individuals whose perspective was important to me, but I would have had to risk my safety to access them. For example, towards the end of my fieldwork, I was offered by some lawyers who were supporting and representing the killers of alleged blasphemers in courts to go on a country-wide tour with them to meet those killers—their heroes—and their families. It was an extremely tempting offer because it would have provided me with a wealth

of information about the lives of those who engage in anti-blasphemy violence. However, I was warned by concerned people not to take the risk of travelling with those lawyers and I decided to let go of that opportunity. Thus, my decisions regarding my field sites and participants were guided—and limited—by concerns for safety.

There are two aspects of my research methodology that I would like to discuss in more detail: methods that I used to identify and approach my research participants and methods of data collection. In terms of approaching the research participants, I started with some publicly available contacts of NGOs for my initial entry into the field during my Masters' research. I chose the NGOs as the entry point because it appeared the safest option at the time. Some of them who responded positively to my research aims and intentions, helped me get in touch with more people (within the NGO sector and amongst those affected by blasphemy accusations). Later, when I went back for my doctoral research, some of my previous contacts were extremely helpful in letting me back into their circles and introducing me to more people. At the same time, I began expanding the scope of my research and called publicly available phone numbers of some religious scholars and leaders. Some of them responded and agreed to meet me in person, for some others I had to use family contacts (for example, an uncle of mine who is a member of Jamaat-e-Islami put me in touch with some people in that organisation). Once I had established some key contacts, they were happy to refer me to more people within their circles and give me further contacts. Some of my academic friends and mentors at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (where I studied for my undergraduate degree) were also of great help in putting me in touch with relevant people such as lawyers, journalists, etc. One of the defense lawyers gave me contacts of prosecution lawyers and that is how I ended up studying a specific group of prosecution lawyers who represent the accusers of blasphemy in courts. The prosecution lawyers also put me in touch with their clients (the accusers), who then let me talk to their witnesses, their spiritual and religious leaders and so on. Hence, for the most part of my research, I used the snowball sampling or chain-referral methods to identify and approach my research participants. Of course, there were many referred persons who never responded; there were also some who promised collaboration, which did not however materialise. Nevertheless, I found a wealth of connections and information through my initial connections and their referrals.

As for the data collection, I used a range of different methods including participant observation, structured and semi-structured interviews, and content analysis. For most of my

participants, I started with formal interviews and continued to see them regularly such that the relationships grew into more informal interactions allowing me to engage in casual conversations and participant observation. Since I was not based at one fixed site, amongst one group or community, I kept moving between different groups and individuals depending on their availability and my schedule. However, I actively tried to dedicate weeks (and sometimes even months) to specific groups to develop deeper connections and understanding. For example, with the Khatm-e-Nabuwat Lawyers' Forum (the group of prosecution lawyers I studied), I spent several days a week over four months to understand their perspective. Similarly, I maintained connections with the accused and their families, trying to see them as many times as they wanted to see me. Some of them kept calling back and inviting me to their homes to talk about their experiences. However, I was cautious not to put pressure on any of them to maintain contact because of their own safety concerns. I also collected a lot of printed and published data, mostly from the religious organisations and scholars whom I met. They gave me or referred me to dozens of religious publications (mostly in Urdu). I acquired as many of those books and other publications as I could and used them for content analysis. I also followed social media accounts of religious organisations who were active in anti-blasphemy campaigning during my fieldwork. Some of the major organisations used Twitter to organise their regular protests and gatherings. While I was not able to participate in those protests and gatherings because they were male-only, familiarising myself with the language of mobilisation helped me gain a deeper understanding of the issue. I also kept an eye on their social media content to understand the religio-political narratives being generated and promoted.

Positionality and Ethical Concerns

As I hinted at the beginning of this chapter, my research has been a deeply emotional process for me. My positionality in the field poses some ethical concerns that must be addressed. My identit(ies) and my values directly influence my position as a researcher and how I deal with the ethical concerns. Therefore, I believe a discussion of my positionality is pertinent to understanding not only my research but also my analysis and writing. Kirin Narayan's 1993 essay first dispelled the myth of insider vs. outsider anthropologists and argued that a multiplex of identities shapes any anthropological research (673-6). Since then, it has been widely recognised in anthropology that the positions we occupy in the society including class,

gender, education, etc. define how we interact with and are perceived by our research participants. More importantly, these social loci also define our own subjectivities, and determine how we look at, understand, and write about people. I believe various markers of my identity including my being an educated Pakistani woman from a lower-middle class, mixed sect (Sunni-Shia) Muslim family are of crucial significance to my research.

I was born in Pakistan to a lower-middle class family from a small town. I was the first woman from my entire family (both mother's and father's side) to go to university and live by herself in a different city.⁵ I went to a private university, considered the most expensive and most prestigious in Pakistan, which my parents were certainly not able to afford. I was selected for university through a National Outreach Program that gave scholarships to deserving students with insufficient financial means to pay their fees. At university, I attended a class on the Ethnography of Pakistan in my first year because of the university's requirements to take out-group courses (that is, courses from different streams and disciplines). That is where I was first drawn to Anthropology and eventually changed my major to Anthropology from Economics. My parents were not happy with that choice because they wanted me to study something that would get me a well-paying job. They did not know much about Anthropology; in fact, they had never even heard of this subject before. What they knew was that 'social science subjects' were not an economically viable option for people with modest economic backgrounds such as ours.

The pursuit of social sciences (and Anthropology) has in fact been a luxury for most scholars of Pakistani origin—at least those who have been writing for an international academic audience. There have been brilliant anthropologists—including women—from Pakistan who are highly regarded in the international academic community, but most came from privileged backgrounds. For the lower-middle class backgrounds like mine, education is usually a means to attain social prestige and upward economic mobility. Therefore, studying Anthropology is

⁵ There was one female cousin of mine who went to university before me. She had started university a year before me, but she went to an all-female university, studied medicine, and lived with her relatives during her studies. I, on the other hand, went to a co-ed university, did not study medicine (the expected and the most prestigious profession for women in our social circle at the time), and lived by myself in a hostel.

an act of going against the grain⁶. My place in the social and economic setup of the society is important because it defines my experiences of living in the Pakistani society—which may be different from most other scholars who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds than mine. These experiences shape who I am as a researcher, how I approach and am perceived by my research participants, and how I understand the experiences of those I am writing about. I shall come back to this later when I discuss the ethics of doing the research. For now, I would like to discuss other markers of my identity that significantly impact my research.

My gender is also an important part of my identity that affects every aspect of my life from education to personal relationships. What is most important to highlight here is the ways in which my gender impacts my research. Most of my research participants are male and many of them come from backgrounds where it is not common for women to be educated, independent, and to freely mix with men, let alone do research amongst men. Having said that, even though many of my research participants would not allow women from their families to do what I was doing, those men are moving in public spaces where women *are* present as lawyers, religious scholars, NGO workers, farmers, laborers, etc. Thus, I was not an entirely unusual sight for them. Most of them were extremely respectful in their dealings with me, and perhaps even more respectful because of my gender. I realise that male researchers may not be able to get as favorable a response from some groups of participants as I did. This is partly due to the culture of special treatment of women (pampering, protecting, looking after them) and partly because as a woman I am less threatening to them as compared to male researchers.

There were some unfortunate incidents of sexual harassment as well which cut across the circles I was moving in. I reported a couple of the incidents to the respective organisations/groups. There were others that I could not report because they were coming from those already in extremely vulnerable situations (fighting for the right to live). To report them would have meant having to reveal details about their identity and location which did not align with my research ethics. It does not mean that their acts can be justified but that

⁶ This is changing now, increasingly more students from similar backgrounds as mine are studying these subjects due to rising awareness about scholarships and career opportunities. However, it still remains to be seen how many of those without the privilege and the social capital that comes with it are able to make it as successful academics and scholars.

power relations were complex which required me to take difficult decisions. They had certain power over me because of my gender and they abused it. I also had certain power over them as a researcher who had been let in on sensitive information. I chose not to use my power in my personal interest. I am not the first person to have experienced sexual harassment in the field as a female anthropologist; it is recognised as a widespread problem that anthropology students are insufficiently prepared for (see e.g., Johansson 2015, Berry et al. 2017, Kloth 2017). Nevertheless, it remains a pressing issue in practically all fields and professions and acknowledging the occurrence of these problems in our work is the first step towards change. Thus, while my gender enabled my entry into certain circles, it became a barrier to participating in others. There were situations in which I had to turn down valuable opportunities to learn simply because I felt vulnerable as a woman and had to look after my safety first. There were potential spaces for research that I could not access because of my female identity. For example, most of the religious and political gatherings concerning the disrespect of the Prophet are male-only and I could not participate in them.

My religious background is another important aspect of my positionality. My father's family are Shia Muslims and my mother's family are Sunni Muslims. Therefore, I grew up in a Shia-Sunni mixed family. The mix was even more complicated by the fact that my father's father had converted from Sunni Islam to Shi'ism in his mid-life, effectively causing his wife and children to convert as well. Therefore, my father's cousins (and their children) are also Sunni Muslims. I grew up in an environment where tensions related to right or wrong practices/beliefs were a part of everyday life. There were conflicts and ruptures, but there were also reconciliations and bridges. There were judgements and disapprovals, but there was also tolerance and acceptance. Impassioned arguments about Shia vs. Sunni religious practices were common, but so were joint participation by Sunni and Shia members of the family in each other's rituals. Nonetheless, my father's religious practices were dominant in my upbringing simply because of the patriarchal principle that children must take after their father's religion. However, I grew up as a very confused person in terms of my religious identity.

I spent my teenage years trying to figure out the 'right path' for myself by reading religious books from both sects. As I navigated the journey, I swung different ways at different points in my life. At one point, I became more religious than anyone else in my family, including in ways they did not approve of. In my early undergraduate years, I started praying regularly,

covering my full head and body, and adopted many other religious practices that were not common in my family. Later, in my early twenties, I gave up most of the outwardly religious practices I had adopted so fiercely only a few years ago. There were several factors that influenced the changes that I went through and the practices that I adopted at different points along my journey. I do not want to go into details of my personal religious journey, but I would like to discuss a couple of things that I believe have significance for my research and my positionality.

First, at every point in my life, I have felt that I was being measured against certain standards by people around me. The standards changed depending on the people, but there was always a sense of insufficiency and the need to prove one's 'goodness' as a Muslim. In crude terms, it can be called moral policing, which is far worse for women, and as a woman breaking several norms, I experienced it to a much higher degree. It was much later that I came to understand the said moral policing as stemming from people's own moral anxieties and was able to (mostly) liberate myself from people's judgements and disapprovals in living my life. As a younger person though, I was constantly trying to change myself to fit the religious standards as well as to carve out my own ideals. In the process, I was not only being measured by others, but was also participating in measuring others. I was not only being judged in respect of my faith but was also judging others' Muslim-ness. Thus, from my experience of growing up in Pakistani society, I have learnt that the constant struggle to achieve moral and religious correctness and to police other people's moral and religious behavior is an ingrained aspect of life in Pakistan. This perspective shapes my arguments in this thesis and is based on my own subjective experiences and position in the society.

As much as religious policing is a part of life in Pakistan, there are also some traditions that promote more inclusive ideals. In fact, my earliest introduction to the values of inclusivity, pluralism, tolerance, coexistence, and humanism was not through Western philosophy or anthropology. It was through Sufi poetry that I first learnt the ideas of transcending boundaries of religion, sect or caste. Sufi poetry is a vital part of multiple genres of Pakistani music (folk, pop, classical, etc.), and is replete with messages of love and harmony. Here is one of my favorite couplets from a popular Punjabi Sufi poet, Bulleh Shah (1680-1757):

*Masjid dha de, Mandir dha de, dha de jo kuch dhainda
Ik banday da dil na dhaawiin, rabb Dillan wich rehnda*

Translation (by me):

Tear down the mosque, demolish the temple; Break whatever you like,
But do not break a person's heart; That is where the God resides.

This is a famous couplet, also used in popular music lyrics, with a message that God is not found in mosques or temples but in people's hearts. It speaks of the intrinsic value of every human regardless of their religion. This is just one example of the much wider ethos of Sufi poetry that I started reading and listening to in my undergraduate years. It provided me solace and hope in the face of sectarian tensions that had defined my identity throughout my life. Ironically, it is mostly the followers of Sufis who are engaged in violently protecting the symbols of their religion under the pretext of blasphemy and purging other human beings in the process. However, this is not where the irony begins, this is where it ends. In its more mundane forms this irony exists in people reading, listening, and sharing Sufi poetry with messages of love and harmony and simultaneously judging other people around them, disapproving of them, and even discriminating against them based on their religious outlook in everyday life.

I was naïve when I first got into Sufi philosophy and poetry; I thought that everyone who was into this art and literature could relate to the deeper meanings being promoted and would be more tolerant and inclusive in their everyday relationships. I was wrong; I learnt it the hard way through heartbreaks from people who were close to me and whom I had come to admire for their interest in Sufism. I also learnt that even those people who are not particularly interested in Sufism, appreciate music and poetry based on Sufi ideas for the sake of it, but do not necessarily believe in or practice those ideas. After several years of research on this topic, I also realise now that there are concepts and ideas within the Sufi traditions (such as irrational passionate love) that have the potential to be interpreted and used to justify and promote violence. At the same time, there is also a long history of Sufis themselves being persecuted for heresy and apostasy in Muslim societies. Thus, I write this thesis from a place of deep sorrow and pain because I see the ideas I once admired and found comfort in being used to spread hatred and violence instead of love and harmony.

The final aspect of my identity that I would like to discuss is my being an anthropologist. While Sufism was my first introduction to the ideas of inclusivity and coexistence, they were

nevertheless abstract ideas (and ideals). Anthropology showed me the true diversity of human beings, introduced the idea of differences as a part of human condition and taught me that there is no single/superior truth. I was lucky enough to have some excellent teachers who not only challenged my assumptions (embedded in culture, religion, etc.) at every step but also taught me how to be humble and incorporate anthropological thinking in living my life. Therefore, anthropology is not simply a profession for me, divorced from my lived life. It is a part of my identity as a mindset and a way of life. This perspective deeply impacts my research and writing. I believe in respecting every person I interact with during my research even if I do not agree with them. I also believe in not privileging anyone's truth and experiences over anyone else's. Nevertheless, I am critical of truth claims that take away others' right to life and safety. Above all, I believe in respectful coexistence and stand with all those whose lives are negatively impacted (or lost) simply because their existence is deemed either less worthy or a threat to the morals of those around them. My anthropological stance is not only academic; it is an inherently dissident political position in the state of Pakistan and I would like it to be known as such. I will now discuss how my positionality creates certain ethical dilemmas for me, particularly the questions related to methodology and knowledge production.

Ethics of Doing the Research

Given the multiplex nature of identity, there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us up with the people we study, other facets that emphasize our difference (Narayan 1993, 680).

This quote from Narayan succinctly captures the essence of relationships we build as anthropologists with our research participants. It is not only the researcher's identity that is complex, but every research participant also brings a multiplex of identities to the interaction. The facets of my identity that join me up with some of my participants also create differences with other participants at the same time and vice versa. There are certain aspects of my identity that the participants themselves chose to emphasise because they could relate to them. However, they were not the only ones making these choices; I also chose to intentionally highlight or suppress certain facets of myself depending on who I was interacting with.

Most of my research participants from religious minorities related to my minority status as a Shia Muslim. They often took me as 'one of their own'—the persecuted minorities of

Pakistan. There were a few exceptions, for example, a Christian woman I interviewed expressed her deep anger for the Muslims by addressing me as ‘You, Muslim people!’. I was both a face of (rare) Muslim compassion and a face of Muslim brutality for these people. To my Muslim participants who were accused (or their friends/families), I was a sympathiser, a comrade, who understood their experiences when their own relatives had abandoned them. To the accusers and their supporters (witnesses, lawyers, religious scholars, etc.), I was someone suspicious whose ideas and aims were unclear to them. Sometimes they took me as a journalist, other times as someone who does not know much about religion and needs guidance. I was cautious about revealing my Shia identity to my Sunni participants in the beginning, but soon realised that the Sunni Barelwis also relate to Shias on many levels: the reverence of holy personalities (many of whom are common to both sects), devotional practices and shrine culture. Both Barelwis and Shias have been criticised by the Deobandis and other sects in Pakistan for their Sufism-inspired devotional practices and reverence of shrines/saints. Thus, after I had disclosed my Shia identity to the Barelwi participants, they discussed their devotional Sufi ideas and practices with me much more openly.

However, in suppressing and bringing forward specific aspects of my identity, I also manipulated people’s perceptions of me. For example, to the accusers and supporters of anti-blasphemy violence, I did not divulge my religious views or my opinions on the issue of punishment for blasphemers. They were of course suspicious of me and kept asking me for my opinion on specific cases or the issue in general. I presented myself as someone without much religious knowledge seeking to learn from them to build my own opinions. When they asked me how I felt somebody should be punished after they had allegedly committed blasphemy, I told them that I was not an expert on religious or legal matters, so I was not able to issue a verdict on that. I did in fact want to learn from them and understand their point of view. However, at no point did I ever believe that anyone should be killed for disrespecting any religion. It was important to ensure my own safety while doing the research, therefore I had to suppress that part of my identity during the research. Nevertheless, I have continued to ask myself whether it is a betrayal of trust? Other anthropologists working in their own communities have asked similar questions; for example, Ceja-Zamarripa (2007) wrote,

There are times that I have felt like a thief, or perhaps a cultural traitor, displaying the pains and woes of my community for all to see, and to whose benefit? (14)

I will come back to the question of ‘whose benefit’, but here I want to stress the ethical dilemmas created by my choice to suppress certain aspects of my identity to gain access to some people’s lives. Some of my research participants expressed on multiple occasions that they hoped I will use my pen to write for Islam, for the Prophet Muhammad and his honour. They expected me to write what they thought I should write, but I never made any promises to them. I suppressed my identity and presented a specific part of myself, just as I—and we all—do with most other relations around us. Even the people closest to me do not know all aspects of my true identity and it does not feel like a betrayal to me. Perhaps it is the commitment to research ethics that makes me feel more conscious about how I represent myself in research settings as compared to in my everyday life. I have not been able to resolve these dilemmas completely, but I have attempted to be self-reflexive at every point in my research.

Class differences (perceived and real) also played a significant role in determining my relationships with my participants. A lot of my research participants belonged to lower socioeconomic backgrounds (workers, manual labourers, etc.). Many of them saw me as a member of the elite class because of my education, and other physical attributes such as clothing, vehicle I used to get to them, etc. I always felt a little uneasy because of my privileges as compared to these people. The uneasiness was compounded by the fact that many of them went out of their way to entertain me. They would cook meals with multiple dishes including meat for me despite my insistence on not visiting them during meal times. I knew that many of those families could not afford meat as a part of their everyday diet. They cooked those meals to match what they thought of as *my* status. I was often left in situations where I could not say no to them because they had already gone out of their way to arrange something for me, but taking those favours made me feel extremely embarrassed of myself. I tried to dress as plainly as possible when visiting these people and to underplay any other physical or perceived attributes of my social and economic status.

On other occasions, I decided to highlight certain aspects of myself that would join me with the people I was interacting with. There were times when people expressed what they thought of as differences in our socioeconomic backgrounds. I took some of those occasions as opportunities to put them (and myself) at ease by talking about things that join us. For example, when visiting a family, I was left to sit with their three teenage daughters for quite some time. They were brilliant girls, all going to a nearby public school, and talked to me

about their education and studies. They talked to me about how they dreamt of being ‘as educated as me’ but had no hope due to their limited means. I told them that I was in a similar position as them because my parents were unable to pay for higher education in good universities. I told them that I had received all my education without paying a single rupee because of the scholarships that I won. They were inspired and motivated and felt a lot more connected to me at the same time.

There was also an element of people’s expectations of me when they went out of their way to treat me nicely. In some cases, they dropped subtle hints that they were expecting financial and/or material help from me. In other cases, they explicitly asked me for help (material, political, strategic, etc.). Once again, I felt like I was betraying them, by turning their pains and woes into objects of my study and not returning any favours to them. Due to various constraints, I could not provide direct financial/material help to anyone, but I did put them in touch with relevant NGOs and other sources that may be able to help. There were a few exceptional instances where people asked me for illegal help/cooperation. This included requests for help in trying to escape the country illegally to seek asylum, demands for bribery, etc. I did not cater to any of those requests and had to pull out of certain relationships because of such requests.

The ethical concerns discussed so far concerning the process of doing the research are directly linked to my positionality (my religious background, my values, my socio-economic status, and my gender). Despite being a Pakistani, or a so-called ‘insider/native’ anthropologist, the challenges of connecting with the people and developing respectful relationships with them define my research. In some ways being an ‘insider’ comes with a much higher degree of moral responsibility as people put certain expectations (such as to abide by the local norms) on me. It was due to my insider/native status (as a Pakistani Muslim) that some of my research participants hoped I would write to defend Islam and Prophet Muhammad. It was also because of my insider status that I was rebuked for my lack of ‘proper knowledge of Islam’ by some of my research participants. My native status thus makes me more vulnerable to moral policing within the familiar settings. As an insider, I pose a different kind of threat as ‘the enemy within’ for some of my research participants. Navigating the expectations and demands of the diverse groups of participants while ensuring their and my own safety was and remains a daunting task for me.

Ethics of Knowledge Production

The ethics (and politics) of the knowledge that I produce through this thesis also beg some deliberation. Who am I writing for? Who do I represent? And what does this thesis aim to achieve? These questions need to be considered in the context of wider politics within and outside academia. Pakistan is a post-colonial state that continues to be looked at through colonial lenses and represented as an under-civilised nation within the western academic and political sectors. In the current global political context, Pakistan is also seen as a fundamentalist/terrorist nation. Within this context then, my thesis may reinforce the existing stereotypical image of Pakistan, a concern many anthropologists working on violence have to grapple with (Scheper-Hughes 2002, 348). As this thesis will demonstrate in depth later, Pakistanis are extremely conscious of their national image in the world community. I have been criticised by Pakistanis from all levels of society during my doctoral journey for tarnishing the image of Pakistan/presenting a dark side of Pakistan to the world. For these Pakistanis, I am a misguided/westernised person at best and a traitor of the nation at worst. I represent the much dreaded 'Western agenda' of undermining the national image of Pakistan to many Pakistanis. On the other hand, there are Westerners for whom I am either championing human rights or humanising the brutal killers and religious fanatics of Pakistan.

It is important to take these criticisms into account because I believe that knowledge is inherently political, and these criticisms highlight some of the ways in which knowledge produced by my thesis can be politicised. I am based within the Western academic system and am writing for other academics. However, I write as a Pakistani and represent the persecuted and marginalised Pakistanis. My interest in the topic of blasphemy arises from my own experiences of being reproached for being different or inadequate as a Muslim at various points in my life. I decided to write this thesis because I was distressed by the suffering of those who are accused of blasphemy and many others who live their lives in fear because they are highly likely to be potential victims. My thesis provides insights into people's violent behaviour and the meaning it holds for them. Understanding those meanings is the first step towards stopping the violence. I take a stance against all reductionist understandings of Pakistan as a fundamentalist or fanatic nation. These labels do not help us understand the complexities of the moral landscape in Pakistan as the people who are engaged in anti-blasphemy campaigning have also been protesting against the terrorist outfits in Pakistan. The

simplistic understandings of religion, society, and nation, therefore, do not get us anywhere and that is exactly what I demonstrate through this thesis. At the same time, I believe writing about the social problems of my country does not make me a traitor, neither does it give the country a bad name. If there is anything that tarnishes the image of Pakistan it is the violence in the name of religion, and it cannot be overshadowed by my (and many others Pakistanis') attempts towards a more peaceful and tolerant society. My position on representation of violence in Pakistan, thus, resonates with the words of late Pakistani poet, Habib Jalib, *Zulmat ko zia kya likhna?* (Why write the dark night as dawn?).

Chapter 3 - Historical Roots of Anti-Blasphemy Violence in Pakistan: Formation of Self, Community and the State

In the old city of Lahore, at the Miani Sahib graveyard—one of the oldest graveyards in the region—lies a shrine adorned in white marble and dressed in embroidered sheets and flower petals. Every year, thousands of devotees visit the shrine to pay their respects. The archway leading to the shrine reads: ‘Lover of the Prophet, Ghazi Ilmuddin Shaheed’. It is the final resting place of the highly revered Ghazi Ilmuddin Shaheed—the successful warrior and martyr: Ilmuddin. Ilmuddin was a young Muslim man who was executed by the British government in 1929 for killing a Hindu publisher—Rajpal—who had published an allegedly derogatory book about the Prophet Muhammad (I. Khan 2011, 60). The book titled *Rangila Rasul* (colourful Prophet) was published in 1924 leading to widespread protests by Muslims for its portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad’s ‘sexual dalliance’ (Stephens 2014, 45). In 1927, after Rajpal had been tried for hate speech—upon complaints by Muslims—and acquitted by the British courts, as many as 70,000 Muslims gathered in Delhi to protest the acquittal (Nair 2013, 323). In the protests, slogans of ‘death for defamation of the Prophet’ were raised, eventually leading up to the murder of Rajpal by Ilmuddin (ibid.). After his trial and then execution by the British courts, Ilmuddin was turned into a Muslim hero, ‘who had the courage to avenge the disrespect for Prophet Muhammad’ by meting out ‘the punishment which the British colonial government could not award’ (Rumi 2018, 323). His act of defending the honour of the Prophet by killing Rajpal was lauded by prominent religious leaders of the time and the founding fathers of Pakistan (ibid.). In the present-day Pakistan, Ilmuddin is a national hero; he is not only celebrated in textbooks and popular cinema but there are also government buildings named after him (ibid., 322-323).

The fact that Ilmuddin is widely revered in Pakistan today is directly related to the attitudes concerning blasphemy and its punishment in the present-day Pakistan. In this chapter, I aim to investigate the shared historical roots of the Ilmuddin’s case and the incidents of blasphemy-related violence in contemporary Pakistan. In the introduction to this thesis, I pointed out that the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan is often reduced to the legal problem. The tendency to look at blasphemy-related violence as a legal problem also means that its origin is often traced back to the 1980s when the current anti-blasphemy legislature of Pakistan was introduced by the military ruler, General Zia-ul-Haq (see e.g., Dobras 2009; Hayee 2012; Hoffman 2014;

Saiya 2016; Siddique and Hayat 2008). The problem of blasphemy is thus attributed to Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation policies in his attempt to gain legitimacy for his military rule (Saiya 2016, 10; Siddique and Hayat 2008, 311-312). While the introduction of the anti-blasphemy legislature in the 1980s has dramatically increased the incidents of blasphemy cases reported (*Dawn News* 2010), the earlier incidents like that of Ilmuddin cannot be ignored if we want to fully understand the context of the blasphemy related violence in Pakistan. Moreover, it has also been noted that Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation of the laws was 'aided by popular support' (Hoffman 2014, 371). Thus, the popular support for the punishment of blasphemy existed *before* the amendments to law were made by Zia-ul-Haq. Therefore, I suggest that the events of the 1980s should be seen as a *continuation* of the *Rangila Rasul* controversy rather than the *origin* of the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan.

The aim of this chapter is to trace the historical roots of the development of religio-political consciousness amongst the South Asian Muslims that connects the case of Ilmuddin and other similar controversies (concerning religious offences) of the early twentieth century to present-day incidents of anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan. I will demonstrate in this chapter that the anti-blasphemy sentiments are a part of wider religio-political sensibilities of the Pakistani Muslims that developed in specific historical circumstances. I bring together processes of self-making, community-making, and state-making in my historical analysis to highlight the emergence of anxieties concerning individual, communal, and national identities. I argue that these anxieties—arising from specific historical circumstances—are central to the anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan. I look at the processes of modernisation, colonisation, nationalism, and globalisation within the specific context of South Asia to understand the current sensibilities of the Pakistani Muslims. In particular, I focus on three key historical developments that I believe are crucial to understanding the anti-blasphemy violence in contemporary Pakistan: 1) The development of morally anxious modern Muslim self under the influence of reformist movements in the sub-continent, 2) The anxieties related to the self-contradictory national identity of Pakistan, and 3) The state of Pakistan's policies to achieve uniformity and homogeneity by denying and curbing differences. I will demonstrate how these processes bear on the contemporary life of Pakistani Muslims at individual, communal, and national levels and shape the wider understandings of blasphemy and its punishment.

Modernity, Reform Movements and Transformation of the Self

The present consciousness concerning the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan is an entirely modern phenomenon and reflects the modern condition of the Pakistani Muslims. In this section, I will discuss the emergence of the modern Muslim self under the influence of various reform movements that emerged in South Asia in the wake of modernity. Modernity—an era commonly understood to have started in seventeenth century Europe—is seen by anthropologists, sociologists, and critical theorists as comprising of specific social processes, attitudes, discourses, and economic conditions. Some of the widely agreed distinct markers of modernity include industrialisation, rise of capitalism and market economy, and the development of nation states (Berman 2010, 16-30; Giddens 1991, 6). The underlying features of modern institutions include standardisation, centralisation, and all-encompassing control of human life on the one hand, and individualisation, liberation, emphasis on free will, and loss of certainty on the other hand (see e.g., Bauman 1989, 2000; Giddens 1991). Similarly, modernity has been characterised by both emancipation from religion and religious revival at the same time (Hervieu-Léger 1990; Lambert 1999). While these characteristics of modernity are considered to be universal, as is the transition to modernity itself, the specificity of modernity to different local contexts—multiple modernities—has also been acknowledged (Delanty 2007; Eisenstadt 2000).

The onset of modernity in South Asia is largely seen as triggered/forced by the colonisation of the sub-continent by the British in the eighteenth century. However, some of the changes in the sub-continent's political sphere *prior* to the arrival of the British have also been described as headed in the general direction of modernity. For example, the consolidation of the Mughal Empire under the rule of the last Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (reg. 1658–1707) whose policies tended towards standardisation of law and governance (Malik 2008, 189-195). There were also general reformist tendencies under the influence of Muslim scholars such as Sirhindi who aimed to revive Islamic practices in the society (ibid., 179-180).

Nevertheless, despite the unifying efforts of the Mughal Emperors and the reformist tendencies of some Muslim scholars, the internal diversity of the Muslims prevented centralisation from being fully implemented (Malik 2008, 209). Under the Mughal rule, the local population of India—religiously diverse as it was—was organised along the lines of caste, ethnicity, language, and regional identities. Francis Robinson (1998) notes that Indian

Muslims socially identified themselves according to their lineage and regional ties rather than their ‘Muslim’ identity. In the Mughal courts, the Muslim elite identified themselves as Persians or Turks; amongst the general populace family history (kinship ties), place of settlement and ethnic belonging were sources of identification and even divisions (Robinson 1998, 271-272). In most cases, the lower castes—of Hindus as well as Muslims—shared more organic identity due to the shared exigencies of their everyday lives (Malik 2008, 172).⁷ Thus, while religion had its role in the Empire and in the lives of the elite Muslim scholars, it was not the primary basis of categorisation in the society. In fact, religion as such did not exist as a distinct category separate from other spheres of life.

The colonisation of the sub-continent by the British completely transformed the socio-political institutions and the life-worlds of the local Indian population. Several historians have attributed the reification of Muslim identity—as well as other religious identities of South Asia—to circumstances created by the British colonial policies aimed at modernising and secularising the Indian sub-continent (see e.g., Metcalf 1982; Osella and Osella 2008; Zaman 2002). The British brought Western conception of modernity with categorisations such as religious/secular, private/public at the heart of their policies. Thus, the forced imposition of categories of political, legal, religious, and cultural as distinct from each other was essentially a modern phenomenon with an imperialist aim to govern/control the colonial subjects (Zaman, 1999, 297). The colonial rulers not only made religion the prime identifier of their subjects, differentiating between Hindus, Muslims, and other religious communities at the official level but also aimed to push their religions out of the public sphere (van der Veer 2002, 179). In doing so, they stripped religious aspects of public life to make the local population more secular and modern. The British law, governance, and education systems were all geared towards the aim of *secularisation*⁸.

⁷ The presence of caste amongst the South Asian Muslims has been documented from as early as thirteenth century (Malik 2008, 157). There will be more discussion of caste in Chapter 5.

⁸ It must be noted that the political project of ‘secularisation’, as Talal Asad (2003) has argued in his book *Formations of the Secular*, is a historically specific development. Asad problematised the simplistic understanding of secularism as separation between religion and politics, and assumptions of its neutrality or opposition to religion. He also questioned the uniformity and singularity of the notion of secularism. Instead, he demonstrated that *secularisms* as practised in the modern Western states today are products of specific historical developments within Christianity and Western philosophy. The secularism that the British were trying to implement was also a particular political system with its roots in English religious history. It was not based on

The British ‘reform’ and ‘restructuring’ of educational and legal institutions were particularly important in this regard. Under the Mughal rule, the *madrassahs*—educational institutes—were spaces of comprehensive learning where religious education was not separated from legal training and other subjects such as mathematics, philosophy, etc. The British imposed an educational reform in which they aimed at ‘taking education out of the religious sphere’ by ‘excluding all formal instruction in religion from the school curriculum’ so that ‘religion could be confined to a definite sphere, which in turn ought to be excluded from the course of general education’ (Zaman, 1999, 296). However, as Peter van der Veer has shown, despite the claims of secularising the education system, much of the British education system was ‘in the hands of Christian missionaries’ whose explicit aim was to convert the local population to Christianity rather than provide religiously neutral education (van der Veer 2001, 98). Hence, the British imposed separation of (local) religious education from the secular (Christian) education system.

The traditional *madrassahs* were highly specialised and produced elite religious scholars—*Muftis*—who were incorporated in the courts of the empire as official interpreters of Islamic law. The British replaced the existing legal systems with the Western legal system, which was based on an understanding of law and religion as separate categories. In modernising the law, they introduced distinct secular and personal laws. The latter referred to community specific laws—based on religious affiliations—that would regulate matters of personal life such as marriage, divorce, children and inheritance. The British judicial system initially employed some of the Muslim religious scholars to interpret Islamic laws, but abandoned them soon after, as they were not considered ‘rational’ and thus not reliable in their interpretations. Zaman (2002) describes this move as follows:

To the colonial officials, the very character of precolonial law and legal practice was uncertain, unsystematic, and arbitrary. Their own judicial practice was not always very different, ... judicial discretion in fact played a large role in how particular crimes were punished by British officials. Yet when not practiced or recommended by

the separation of the Church from the state; rather the two were intricately linked to each other. In fact, the Church of England established several dioceses in India during the colonial rule. Peter van der Veer’s (2001, 2002) work also shows how specific religious agenda of the British was pushed in the guise of secularity and neutrality towards religion.

themselves, it was precisely such discretion that appeared to them as little better than sheer arbitrariness. And it was this and other perceived failings of the indigenous legal systems that the British venture in the codification of the law was intended to finally remedy (Zaman, 2002, 22).

Hence, the religious scholars were excluded from the legal system under the British rule. Zaman (2002) notes that under the traditional system,

the muftis and the judges had been part of the same intellectual universe, products of the same legal tradition. This was no longer the case in colonial India. And what added insult to injury was that these colonial judges, administering the Anglo-Muhammadan law, were not even required to be—and, for the most part, were not—Muslims (25).

In modernising the law and governance, then, the British not only challenged the authority and status of the traditional scholars, but also pushed them to the margins. Thus, with the advent of the British colonisers and loss of Muslim political power, the Muslim religious scholars lost their position and influence in the society. The loss of Muslim political power led to a challenge and threat to their religious and cultural lives as well since these areas of life were all inter-twined for them. The disenfranchised and threatened *Muftis* then took it upon themselves to preserve the Muslim culture and religion, partly to carve out a new space for themselves in the changing society. They emerged as the custodians of a newly developed concept of private *religious sphere* and its role in public life. In Chapter 4, I will discuss in further detail how the nature of the religious authority changed in response to the above-mentioned circumstances. For now, I would like to focus on the widespread religious reform movements initiated by the disenfranchised Muslim scholars of the sub-continent.

Barbara Metcalf (1982) notes that after losing their place in the religio-administrative setup, the religious scholars left big cities and moved to smaller towns and villages where they started their efforts for the revival of Islam (85). They attributed the decline of Muslim political power to Muslims' failure to adhere to *true Islam*. Their campaigns aimed to 'restore the perceived pristine glory of Islam, both politically and religiously, by way of cleansing its prevalent modes of practices and sets of beliefs from what were felt to be later-day accretions (*bid'at*)' (Qasmi 2001, 32). The past glory of Islam—the golden era—was imagined as a 'political and social utopia' that the reformists aspired to recreate (Malik 2008, 200).

Reform movements are nothing new in the history of Muslim societies as 'from the beginning of the Islamic era, Muslim societies have experienced periods of renewal' (Robinson 2008,

259). In fact, as already noted, there were reform movements during the Mughal era as well. However, the conditions created by the British colonisation—imposed modernisation and secularisation—of the Indian sub-continent in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were quite unique and gave rise to a host of reform movements not only amongst the Muslims but Hindus and other religious communities as well (van der Veer 2001, 110)⁹. The changes brought about by this era of colonisation are succinctly described by Robinson (2008) as follows:

Thus, over 200 years, the old ways of getting and spending of nomadic and agrarian societies were supplanted by those of industrialising ones, often driven by global capitalism. The old social hierarchies, which brought order to many a locality, gave way to new classes. The old knowledge, hallowed from the Islamic past, was challenged by new knowledge from what often seemed to be a Godless West (260).

It was within this context that reform movements that arose amongst the South Asian Muslims under the colonial rule were often defined by their ‘opposition to Western cultural and political hegemony’ (Robinson 2008, 261). The aims of these movements can therefore be described as both religious revival *and* anti-colonial resistance. At the same time, the Muslim reformists used uniquely modern ways of thinking and incorporating Western ways and knowledge where appropriate (ibid.). The use of print technology, for example, helped the religious scholars reach masses through their publications. They even published in vernacular languages and used simplified writing styles for ordinary people as opposed to their specialised religious writings for their audience within the scholarly community. Earlier, ‘the referential works of the scholars of the past, Quranic commentaries and Hadith collection could not be mass-produced and widely disseminated’ (Qasmi 2011, 31). The print medium and the simplified language made the message of religious scholars accessible to a much wider audience.

There were various reform movements that began at different points in the modern history of the sub-continent, each with slightly different goals and motivations. They all used—deliberately or otherwise—modern technologies and tools of thinking to varying degrees. Historians have labelled these movements variously, from *Islamic modernism*—adapting

⁹ The strengthening of Hindu identity and the Muslim reform movements went hand in hand and were both the cause and the effect of each other (in a dialectic relationship).

Islam according to modern times—to *Islamic fundamentalism*—rejecting modern/western knowledge and technologies and going back to the perceived fundamentals of Islam—and many variations in between (see e.g., Qasmi 2011, 240; Robinson 2008, 260). It should be seen as a spectrum, with different configurations of modernity and what was thought to be tradition at their heart. However, no matter which configuration was adopted, all these movements were essentially modern in their nature since they took religion as a distinct, reified category and aimed to rationalise it in the modern world.

Scholars of modernity and Islamic revivalism have highlighted various characteristics that pervade these reform movements, not only in South Asia but in Muslim societies across the colonised parts of the world. They have identified aspects such as rejection of past authority, independent reasoning, emphasis on human will and individual responsibility, rationalisation of religious knowledge, etc. to be of crucial significance in all these movements (Metcalf 1982, 12; Osella and Osella 2008, xvi; Robinson 2008, 261). Francis Robinson describes these processes in South Asian Islamic reform movements as follows:

Islamic reform destroyed much of the authority of the past, making possible a more creative engagement with the present. It emphasised human will, preparing the way for the modern understanding of undiluted human instrumentality in the world. It set off transformations of the self that we associate with modernity, the emergence of an internal landscape and the affirmation of the ordinary things of life. It helped set off a rationalisation and reification of Islam, which, amongst other things, prepared Muslims to engage with a broad-based political identity and conceive of their faith as an entity, even a system. And finally, it set going processes that offered both a disenchanted world and one in which paradoxically the transcendent was reasserted, indeed, the world itself was re-enchanted (2008, 279-280).

The changes of the self, which Robinson calls *transformations of the self* are of crucial significance to my argument in this thesis. Several historians have noted a shift towards personal and individual moral reform as the religious scholars took to the masses to regain their influence in the society. Since they had the private religious sphere—separate from the secular public sphere—available to them, the religious scholars directed their focus to reform the private moral lives of the individuals. They aimed to inculcate a renewed sense of piety and virtue amongst the individuals through various methods of proselytisation. They preached higher standards of faith and morality based on the reformed religious ideals to common people. The individual moral life was thus subjected to much more scrutiny and regulation.

Even the *Fatwas* (religious verdicts) of that time demonstrated a move away from the matters of governance to matters of individual morality and piety (Qasmi 2011, 38).

Through their preaching and publications, the religious scholars disseminated the ideals of *authentic* Islam widely amongst the Muslims. This led to an enhanced burden of responsibility falling on the shoulders of individuals as ‘it was the individual human conscience, working with this knowledge, which now had sole responsibility to ensure rightly guided behaviour. Thus, reformed Islam was a willed faith, a ‘protestant’ faith, a faith of conscience and conviction’ (Robinson 2008, 269). Most modern reformist movements in the sub-continent have emphasised individual responsibility to aspire and achieve religious piety over communal religious practices. It has been argued that the reformist-Islamist movements in the present-world are in fact a consequence of modernity rather than a response to it, because of their ‘preoccupation with the individual and its subjectivity’ (Verkaaik 2004, 45). Similarly, Roy (1994) has argued that modern Muslims’ religious experiences are increasingly centred on individuality and authenticity of the self. The reformist tendencies are thus ‘a process of self-making, which may include the reinterpretation of religious traditions, and in which the self seeks its completion in particular social and political acts that express its authenticity’ (Verkaaik 2004, 45). The enhanced focus on human will and individual responsibility along with the increased expectations of adherence to Islam to be a proper Muslim, therefore, gave rise to newer technologies of the self in which the self was constructed primarily as a sinner in need of purification. This transformation also led to a greater emphasis on the bodily practices of the purification of the self. Technologies of the self, as defined by Foucault¹⁰, are techniques,

which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and

¹⁰ Foucault developed the concept of technologies of the self in a 1982 lecture in which he compared the hermeneutics of self in the Greco-Roman philosophy of early Roman Empire—first two centuries A.D—with Christianity of late Roman Empire (fourth and fifth centuries). He noted that the technologies of the self in the classical period consisted primarily of the ‘care of the self’ by subjecting the soul to questions of truth and morality. By the late Roman Empire, the technologies of the self had transformed to an emphasis on bodily discipline—renunciation—and a disclosure of the sinful self. At the end of the lecture, Foucault briefly referred to a further break in the technologies of the self in the modern era whereby the self is constituted positively—without renunciation—through scientific knowledge. The technologies of the self emerging in the modern colonial India can be argued to be a combination of the sinful-self in need of purification and the modern-self subjected to positivist, scientific/rational modes of knowledge.

way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1988, 18).

The modern reformist movements' emphasis on individual piety and moral goodness prompted the inward turn and a reflective approach to be a Muslim, such that the 'Muslims had to ask themselves regularly if they had done all in their power to submit to God and to carry out His will in the world' (Robinson 2008, 272). They had to constantly measure themselves up against the perfection and purity they were supposed to achieve. This inward turn was nothing new as there have been ascetic and reflective tendencies within the Muslim societies throughout history. What was new, however, was the essentialising of the self as lacking and in need of correction. Hence, 'while in the past, the reflective believer, the mystic, might have meditated on the signs of God, the new type of reflective believer reflected on the self and the shortcomings of the self' (ibid., 273). The newer self was thus constructed through constant purification and expulsion of the impurities.

At the heart of this development was the tension between the lived life and the ideals. As Gilmartin (2014) indicates, such a tension had always existed, emanating from 'the interactions between the particular and the universal within Islamic civilisation' (xxxvii). The universal ideals of Islam and its strong ties to the land of its origin—Arabia—were never completely synchronised with the local life of the South Asian Muslims who constructed a composite culture. However, these tensions were exacerbated with the colonial interventions and modern categorisation of religion as a distinct system—which was then perceived at odds with the local life. In the context of Punjab, Gilmartin argues that the newly created 'tensions between ideals and worldly realities' were 'layered onto the older tensions between core Islamic civilizational ideals and lived realities long shaping Punjabi life' (2014, xxxii). The underlying tension between the *universal* and the *particular*, the *ideal* and the *lived* persisted and aggravated the moral anxieties of the ordinary Muslims. The Muslims were increasingly conscious not only of the shortcomings of their selves with respect to the ideal Muslim selves, but also of the deviations of the society from the idealised essence of Islam. Thus, the inner or reflexive turn was also inherently political—culminating in movements for wider social change.

Driven by similar anxieties and with similar aims at their heart, the reform movements developed in various—often conflicting—directions. Three of the most important reformist groups—still relevant to Pakistan—that emerged amongst the Sunni Muslims of South Asia

were Deobandis, Ahl-e-Hadith, and Barelwis. They all emphasise going back and adhering to the original sources of Islam—the Quran and Sunnah (the Prophetic traditions). However, they also have their own specific trajectories of development and ideas of reform. For example, Ahl-e-Hadith do not deem it necessary to follow any school of law or *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) while Deobandis and Barelwis continue to follow the established schools of jurisprudence within Sunni Islam¹¹—the Hanafi school being the most popular amongst them (Behuria 2008, 59). Deobandis and Ahl-e-Hadith, however, do not accept ‘local cultural and custom-based practices’ and other shrine related rituals (Qasmi 2011, 34-35). Barelwis, on the other hand, ‘accept customary practices of mediation closely associated with the *pirs* (spiritual guides) of the shrines and the evocation of the supernatural powers and blessings of other revered figures from the Muslim past’ (ibid.). Thus, as argued by Osella and Osella (2008) there was no uniform reformism, but a period of renewal was experienced by almost all sections of the Muslim society despite their internal differences.

One of the major points of contestation between different reformist groups was the nature and place of Prophet Muhammad in *true Islam*. The increased emphasis on the personality of the Prophet Muhammad and its significance to Muslims’ faith has also been described as a new development within the colonial context. Muslims became increasingly conscious of the image of the Prophet due to encounters with Christian missionaries and other religious groups such as Hindus (Qasmi 2011, 39). In the wake of an increasingly hostile environment and the interaction with the Western powers who challenged the status of Prophet Muhammad, the same became the pivotal point of contestation between different reformist groups. They ardently debated the minutest of details related to the life and personality of the Prophet, as they aimed to come up with a model personality for Muslims to follow. They argued over issues such as the bodily appearance of the Prophet (clothing, length of facial hair, and so on), his method of praying (the positions and postures), and the everyday details of his life. Such an emphasis on the person of the Prophet has also been linked to modernity’s emphasis on the individual self, as Qasmi argues,

¹¹ There are four widely recognised schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, and Hanbali (Coulson 1964, 86). These schools were consolidated in the ninth and tenth centuries and have been sources of guidance, debates, and authority for Muslims since then (Melchert 1997, 1).

This growing emphasis on the person of the Prophet as the exemplar of human perfection and presentation...can also be attributed to an enhanced focus on the individual self—a colonial/capital by-product. The Prophet's 'new' image, thus constructed, emphasised a wide array of his human virtues and projected him as beloved, charitable, frugal, a lover of children, steadfast, successful and so on. This can be taken as an expression of the growing sense of the self amid a newly emerging middle-class Muslim world forced to fall back upon, and coming to terms with, its inner resources (2011, 39).

Malik (2008) describes this shift in the modes of attachment to the Prophet as a transformation from 'mystical piety' into 'prophetic' or 'action piety', in line with the newer technologies of self, discussed earlier (202). Within the context of these developments, the scholars of Islam engaged in renewed studies of the prophetic tradition (*hadith*)—the transmitted knowledge of the Prophet. These new studies shortened the chain of narrators making a quick and effective attachment with the Prophet possible. This form of attachment focused on imitating the everyday life of the Prophet—what Malik calls 'imitatio muhammadi' (ibid.). Thus, the Prophet's *Sunna*—his way of being in this world—became the pivotal point of social and political reform, resulting in the 'Sunnatisation' of Muslims' lifeworlds (ibid.).

The Barelwis—followers of Ahmed Raza Khan Barelwi (1856-1921)—are often seen as the least radical of the reformers as they did not call for a complete eradication of the local customs. Instead, their movement was deeply embedded in the South Asian culture of shrines and reverence of holy personalities and objects. Nevertheless, they were the ones who were most vocal in denouncing others as disrespectful and inappropriate Muslims when it came to the issue of the personality of Muhammad and appropriate ways of attachment to him. The Barelwis' leader issued *Fatwas* against other religious leaders whom he deemed disrespectful of the Prophet (Qasmi 2011, 40). These *fatwas* focussed on improper ways of speaking about the Prophet, inappropriate understanding of the 'true nature' of the Prophet, and inadequate modes of attachment to the Prophet.

The debates on the nature and place of the Prophet in the Muslim society led to polemics concerning his respect as early as the nineteenth century. These concerns were manifested not only in the personal but also in the political domain as they later developed into several emotionally charged massive movements to protect the holy symbols—Quran, mosques, the

Prophet—in the early twentieth century colonial India¹². Gilmartin (1991) in his essay on colonial Muslim politics wrote about the rise of Muslim emotionalism in the political sphere in the 20th century pre-partition India. He argued that the emergence of Muslim publics and community identity in colonial India was rooted in rational self-control of the individual as well as the autonomous realm of the individual heart and emotion (Gilmartin 1991, 131)¹³. Autonomous individuals driven by emotions and engaged in self-making came to form the new Muslim community. It was manifested in the symbolic action in the movements in the 1920s and 1930s for the protection of Khilafat, the Prophet, and mosques. In these movements the discourse of personal and emotional identification with Islamic symbols was translated from press into public action (ibid., 133).

The *Rangila Rasul* controversy of the 1920s—discussed at the beginning of this chapter—was turned into ‘a symbolic test of “love” of the Prophet’ (Gilmartin 1991, 134). It was ‘the *public* display of the heart in the active protection of the honour of the Prophet that defined the real existence of a Muslim community during the Rangila Rasul crisis’ (ibid.). The glorification of Ilmuddin’s act of killing Raj Pal established ‘action in the name of the heart as the most telling validator of Muslim identity’ (ibid., 135). By 1935, one of the most powerful movements for the defence of holy symbols had emerged in Lahore, Punjab to protect the Shahidgunj mosque from demolition by Sikhs. Gilmartin argues that this movement ‘drew on the mosque as a symbol of a transcendent, universalising morality’ which was enabled by ‘new forms of direct individual attachment to the ineffable core of civilisation’ (2014; xxxiii). Thus, it was the modern Muslim selves with the consciousness of their individual

¹² This development, however, was not exclusive to Muslims as other religious communities of South Asia—such as Sikhs and Hindus—also displayed passionate attachment to their religious symbols, for example, through the cow protection movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Brass 1991, 77-80). The central place of emotions in the South Asian public life has been recognised and described as ‘moral outrage’ that has characterised the popular mobilisations in the sub-continent for a long time (Blom and Jaoul 2008, 1-2).

¹³ The transportation of emotions into the public sphere was also facilitated through Urdu poetry. Poets such as Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Muhammad Iqbal brought the long-established literary idioms of inner emotions and desires into the realm of public debate through political poetry and Press. The emotions in Urdu poetry were sometimes seen as ‘irrational’, sometimes intuitive and inner Sufi knowledge. However, with the politicisation of poetry, emotions were also politicised leading up to the ‘movement of the inner world directly onto the political stage’ (Gilmartin 1991, 132).

responsibility and the urge to achieve personal and societal purification who participated in the emotional politics. The centrality of emotions and passionate attachments to the public life of Muslims in the twentieth century South Asia should not be seen in opposition to reason and rationality as it was through the modern techniques and language of reason that the emotional attachments were articulated in the public sphere. The Muslims were not only driven by their modern sensibilities but also engaged with the language of rights and ‘the logic of secular regimes of law’ to express their emotional grievances on the political stage (Stephens 2014, 46-47). While they glorified an act of non-state killing, they also demanded the state to change its legal structure to acknowledge the killing of Raj Pal as legitimate—the introduction of clause 295-A being a response to this demand (ibid.). The reason and passion, therefore, were components of the same popular consciousness.

The development of the religious sensibilities of Muslims concerning certain holy symbols should therefore be seen within the context of modernity, reformation, and transformation of the self, giving rise to a newer consciousness of religious identity not only at the individual but also at the collective level. The development of the new religious identity was also a direct result of colonisation and forced secularisation. The increased consciousness of religious identity, however, does not automatically and necessarily lead to nationalism, and even less so to a specific separatist nationalist movement—the Pakistan Movement in this case. In the next section, I will explain how the heightened sense of religious identity led to the specific outcome of a separate nation state for Muslims: Pakistan.

Nationalism, Religious Identity, and the Pakistan Movement

Nationalism, like modernity, has been described as a global phenomenon. There is a small group of scholars—usually referred to as ‘primordialists’—who see nationalism as an inherent tendency of human beings as humans have formed social groupings and attachments since the beginning of their time on earth (Coakley 2018, 327-329). However, most theorists of nationalism—such as Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Paul Brass, and Eric J. Hobsbawm—see it as a distinctly modern development dating back to the French Revolution, qualitatively different from all previous forms of social groupings. Ernest Gellner (1983) defined nationalism as ‘primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (1). Gellner’s theory of nationalism postulates that ‘nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political

destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that* is a reality, and in general an inescapable one' (1983, 48–49). The modern world, therefore, has been characterised by the emergence of nation-states—political entities claiming sovereignty based on ideas of shared culture.

Thus, when various nationalist movements arose in the twentieth century India, they were a part of the global trend of nationalism. The anti-colonial movements in various parts of the world had also been emerging as nations and following the nation-state model which had come to be a norm in the European world by that point. In fact, the nationalist movements in India—including Muslim nationalisms—were very similar to the nationalist movements around the world. Benedict Anderson (1991) termed modern nations as 'imagined communities' because the members of these nations do not personally know all other members, and will never meet them, but have a shared notion of their communion (B. Anderson 1991, 5-7). The Muslim nationalisms that arose in the sub-continent also had the ideas of imagined communities at their heart—a community of all Muslims of South Asia and beyond. Gellner (1983) also described various features, for example, linguistic standardisation and cultural homogeneity, as part of the project of nationalism (*ibid.*, 55-57). The Muslim nationalism in South Asia was similarly built around the standardisation of Urdu as the language of Muslims through print medium and a supposed sameness of the community. Other features of modern nation-states such as 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm 1983) and manipulation of 'cultural symbols' (Brass 1991), that I discuss in more detail later, were also present in the nationalist movements of the sub-continent.

The nationalist movements of the sub-continent were also culturally and regionally specific. Partha Chatterjee (1993) discussed the emergence of postcolonial nations and how their nationalisms are both specific to their local contexts and products of the universal move towards nationalism at the same time. He objects to Anderson's argument that the colonial world copied Euro-American models of nationalism. Chatterjee instead contends that the colonised people had their own imagined communities and their nationalisms emerged out of their specific imaginations (1993, 5). He argues, in the context of India, that the colonial subjects resisted and developed their own sense of nationalism by developing an 'inner' spiritual domain which they held as sovereign and refused interventions by colonial powers in this inner domain. While colonialism transformed the outer (material) world of

administration, laws, policies, statecraft, science, economics, and infrastructure—which led to apparent imitation of Western nationalism—the local nationalist movements developed a distinct spiritual sphere that was specific to their imagination of community. According to Chatterjee, spiritual is the ‘inner’ domain bearing ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity (ibid., 6). Within this spiritual domain, ‘nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a “modern” national culture that is nevertheless not Western’ (ibid., 7). It was within this ‘inner’ domain that Muslim nationalist movements arose in the sub-continent.

In the previous section, I demonstrated the construction of a peculiarly modern inner sphere of the Muslims that is then politicised and brought into the public sphere. It was this *inner* sphere that was crucial to the establishment of certain cultural symbols as central to Muslims’ nationalist imaginations. While nationalist movements everywhere relied on some central symbols defined by the cultural elite for their collective imaginings, the particularly spiritual and religious nature of symbolism in India is of significance. Thus, as Paul Brass argues, ‘Muslim separatism was not pre-ordained, but resulted from the conscious manipulation of selected symbols of Muslim identity by Muslim elite groups in economic and political competition with each other and with elite groups among Hindus’ (Brass 1991, 76). Of course, the manipulation of certain symbols by the elite groups is possible because people have certain meanings attached to those symbols in the first place. However, those meanings are not fixed in time and are also a product of historical circumstances. As we have already seen, the centrality of the Prophet Muhammad’s personality and the attachment to certain symbols such as mosques were indeed an outcome of specific developments within the individual as well as the collective lives of Muslims in India. However, the politicisation of religious symbols through appeal to popular meanings of those symbols is what gave rise to Muslim nationalism.

Muslim separatism—culminating in the creation of Pakistan—is seen as one of the most powerful nationalist movements to emerge in the British India. In a recent book, Qasmi and Robb (2017) trace the trajectory of Muslim nationalism in the pre-partition Indian sub-continent. They argue that the sharpening of Muslim identity did not automatically lead to the idea of a separate nation-state (9). The Muslims of South Asia were first transformed into a community, then a minority, and then into a nation. The heightened consciousness of religious identity led them to see themselves as a community who then demanded their rights

as a minority community within the undivided India. It was much later that the idea of attaining sovereignty based on their collective identity as Muslims became popular. Even so, this trajectory did not lead to a single, uniform, Muslim nation. Instead, there were several, often conflicting, theories of Muslim nationalism prevalent in the pre-partition colonial India. The idea of Pakistan, peddled by the political elite of the All India Muslim League (AIML), was a specific, albeit triumphant, outcome of *one amongst many* notions of Muslim nationalism prevalent in the twentieth century India (ibid.).

The major trends in the imaginings of a nation by Muslims of the sub-continent ranged from a pan-Islamic community of Muslims (*Ummah*) to regional communities held together by language and culture rather than religion. Tanweer Fazal (2015), in his detailed account of the subject, recounts a range of competing ideas of Muslim nationalism. Pan-Islamism, the concept that Muslims from around the world form a spiritual community regardless of their regional, territorial, ethnic, and other affiliations, was supported by several prominent religious leaders and reformers (such as Abul Ala Mawdudi) as well as the ideological founder of Pakistan, philosopher and poet, Muhammad Iqbal. These ideologues saw the Western concept of territorial nationalism as materially based as compared to their notion of spiritual Islamic universalism (Fazal 2015, 64-65). Another noteworthy trend was that of ‘composite nationhood’, championed by the likes of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a Congress leader, and Islamic scholar Husayn Ahmad Madani who was the head of Deoband seminary and the president of Jamiat-Ulema-i-Hind, a prime collective of the *Ulema* (religious scholars) of India. They advocated for a common nationality for Hindus and Muslims based on their shared cultural and historical ties. Like the pan-Islamists, the composite nationalists also referenced Quran and other religious sources to prove that their theory was in line with the Islamic concept of nationalism (ibid., 66-68)¹⁴. The third most important, and eventually triumphant, take on the Muslim nationalism was based on the Western concept of territorial nation-state, championed by the Western educated elite leadership of the AIML when they proposed a separate nation-state for the Muslims of India in 1940. However, they modified

¹⁴ Contestations of the ideas of *Ummah*, *Qoum*, and *Millat* (three different words referring to community) were at the heart of these formulations. For example, while *Ummah* referred to the spiritual community of all Muslims, *Qoum* meant a regional community for some while a political religious community for others. These three words have varying meaning but also overlapped and shifted.

the western territorial nation-state to suit their own purposes. They argued for a shared history, geography and language of Muslims as the basis for their nationality but at the same time suggested that religious identity should supersede all other affiliations. The idea of a separate state for Muslims thus proposed was not entirely Western but a compromise attempt between the territorial nation-state and a universal Islamic community. Jinnah, the prime leader of AIML and the founder of Pakistan, based his argument for such a state on French philosopher Renan's conceptualisation of subjective nation formation based on a collective 'moral consciousness' and 'will of the aggregate' (ibid., 73).

Many religious leaders (Deobandis, Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat-ulama-e-Hind) were suspicious of the Westernised leadership of the AIML and stood in opposition to the demand for Pakistan. Despite the antagonism, the AIML succeeded in materialising the idea of Pakistan within a short duration of seven years. This was made possible by several factors, including: the lack of other feasible options, manipulation of religious symbolism, and formation of strategic alliances. On a practical level, as Qasmi and Robb (2017) argue, it was a sheer lack of viable alternatives offered by their opponents that worked in favour of the AIML during the political negotiations (4). On a more strategic level, the leadership of the AIML manipulated the symbols of Muslim identity to gain political influence over the masses. For example, as Fazal notes, many 'prominent Leaguers took to praying in public to establish their commitment to their faith' (2015, 75). They also appealed to the heart and emotions of the 'autonomous individual Muslim voter' by using 'deeply rooted language of religious commitment' (Qasmi and Robb 2017, 26). Another strategic move was AIML's courting of Barelwis, particularly the land owning *pirs* (spiritual leaders) who had significant influence over their local populations. Barelwis had a longstanding rivalry with the Deobandis and they supported the idea of Pakistan to counter the position of the Deobandis on Muslim nationalism as well. They formed a significant population of the provinces Jinnah was demanding for Pakistan but supported the AIML only on the condition of making the new state an Islamic state (ibid., 73-75).

Furthermore, while campaigning for Pakistan, the proponents of Pakistan employed 'two-nation theory' which held that Muslims were qualitatively different from Hindus (Cohen 2004, 28). The theory postulated that Muslims and Hindus had different cultures, different religious traditions, different customs, and norms, and hence could not live together. Some validation and political currency were provided to this theory by competitive mobilisation by

Hindu nationalists who used Hindu symbols to lay exclusive claims to Indian territory (Fazal 2015, 72-73). Prominent historians of Pakistan such as Ayesha Jalal and Barbara Metcalf (quoted below) argued that the Pakistan movement was concerned with the power-sharing arrangements between the Muslims and the Hindus of India due to the minority status of the Muslims. They wrote,

The Pakistan movement should not be considered “Islamic”: it was a movement for a secular, liberal democracy, although once the country was established there certainly were voices that sought to create an Islamically ordered state (Metcalf 2004, 1).

Religion is often thought to have been the main impetus behind the creation of Pakistan. The historical evidence militates against such certitude. The demand for Pakistan was intended to get an equitable, if not equal, share of power for Indian Muslims in an independent India (Jalal 2014, 40).

However, the two-nation theory, in constructing the distinct Muslim identity, went far beyond the discourse of economic and political rights of Muslims as a minority in united India. As already mentioned, the use of religious symbolism and politicisation of religious identity were crucial to the success of the Pakistan movement. Jalal and Metcalf also agree that ‘Muslim identity’ was the rallying point for the Pakistan movement. The leaders of the movement constructed the Muslims of India as ‘a homogenous category’ while disregarding their regional, ethnic, linguistic, and class differences (Jalal 2014, 8).

The two-nation theory as the basis for a separate nation-state was inherently contradictory as it was anti-territorial (in creating a pan-Indian Muslim identity) and territorial (demanding a separate geographical territory) at the same time. The relationship between the proposed unifying Muslim identity and the demand for territorial sovereignty remained uncertain even for the chief architect of Pakistan—Jinnah—himself. While propagating the idea that Muslims of India were one nation, the leaders of the Pakistan movement did not demonstrate any concerns about the Muslims living in the Hindu majority areas of India when they demanded the chunk of India with Muslim majority areas be designated as a separate nation state for Muslims (Jalal 2014, 51). Hence, Jalal (2014) contends, ‘reconciling the imperatives of citizenship in a territorial nation-state with the supra-territorial claims of Islamic universalism based on affinity to a worldwide Muslim community was a challenging proposition’ (10). The inherent contradictions in the idea of Pakistan imply a conflation of religious, territorial, and national identity.

Faisal Devji's (2013) noteworthy work on the concept of Pakistan as 'a political idea' combines the modern, religious, and nationalist elements at play in the creation of Pakistan without reducing the motives behind the creation of Pakistan to either religious or secular. He compares Muslim nationalism in South Asia to Zionism in Europe and draws parallels between 'the political ideas' of Pakistan and Israel (ibid., 3). What this political idea essentially means is a territorial nation state claimed on the basis of a universal (anti-geographical) idea of a nation bringing together all Muslims of India severing their ties with their regional, ethnic, and linguistic ties. Devji describes both Pakistan and Israel as exceptions to the norm of nation-states around the world due to their juxtaposition of the territorial and universal claims. The underlying contradictions of the political idea of Pakistan become clearer when he notes,

As early as 1948, in a speech made at a mammoth meeting in Dacca, the Governor-General of a recently created Pakistan made it clear that his new nation would have to repudiate not simply its colonial and more generally Indian past, but even the regional identities of its own Muslim majority, which he fearfully compared to nations in waiting. It was as if Jinnah's own "two-nation theory" had returned to haunt Pakistan with the spectre of more partitions to come, leading him to recommend a politics of unity that was, in appearance, at least, difficult to differentiate from that which characterised his rivals in the Indian National Congress. What distinguished Pakistan's unity from that of its giant neighbour's, however, was the elimination of everything that its people had inherited from their past (10).

The exceptional 'politics of unity' thus formed the foundation of the state of Pakistan from the very beginning. Islam was not only the most important rallying cry for the Pakistan movement but also the only unifying and binding factor for the nascent state of Pakistan (Qasmi 2011, 239). Religious identity was imagined and promoted as the sole basis of unity amongst the residents of Pakistan, while the historical and geographical ties were actively downplayed. Official history was written to inculcate a strong religio-nationalist ideology amongst the people. Despite all these efforts, the fears of Jinnah that Devji speaks of in the excerpt quoted above materialised only two decades later in 1971 when East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) separated from West Pakistan (now Pakistan) due to ethnic and linguistic differences despite the common Muslim identity. Hence, the viability and adequacy of religion as the sole basis of national unity was not only questioned but also strongly refuted by the separation of Bangladesh.

Hence, regardless of whether the leadership of the AIML had wanted a secular or a theocratic state of Pakistan, it is important to understand *how* the idea of Pakistan was sold to the Muslims—already living with moral anxieties under the colonial rule—and what it meant for their imaginations, aspirations, and expectations. The self-contradictory idea of the territorial nation-state of Pakistan based on religious identity rather than cultural, historical, and geographical ties, left Pakistanis with a deep sense of *identity crisis*. This identity crisis was worsened by the separation of Bangladesh that questioned the very basis of the idea of Pakistan. I argue that the moral anxieties of Muslims triggered by modernity, colonisation, and forced secularisation, were compounded by the anxieties related to their national identity after the creation of Pakistan. The underlying tensions of the ideal vs. the lived, the imagined vs. the real, and the universal vs. the local persisted and continued to haunt the post-partition lives of Pakistanis as individuals as well as a community. In the next section, I will discuss how the state of Pakistan has tried to deal with these anxieties by creating a religio-national ideology that aims to suppress differences to achieve uniformity and homogeneity.

The Construction of Homogenous National Subjects and the Passion for Exclusivity

The people of the newly created state of Pakistan were a mix of those who had supported the idea of Pakistan and those who were against it. Even amongst those who supported the idea, there were variations in their understanding of what it entailed and their expectations of it (Jalal 2000, 538). There were many who were indifferent, if not hostile to the idea. Nevertheless, in the process of the partition, the supporters and non-supporters of Pakistan alike suffered great losses. There were millions who migrated across the newly drawn borders to be part of the new state of Pakistan (Brass 2003a, 75). Not all migration was voluntary as many were forced to leave India due to inter-communal violence that accompanied the partition. A major section of the population of Pakistan suffered immense losses—of homes, property, loved ones, livelihoods—in the process (Pandey 2003, 14). Having to build their lives from scratch, they needed a strong sense of purpose to justify their losses. Since religious identity had been sold as the fundamental basis for the creation of Pakistan, and due to lack of common historical and geographical ties to define the newly formed nation, Islam became the refuge, the motivation, and the purpose for a majority of the Pakistanis. The discourses of sacrifice were invoked, glorifying the losses incurred during the partition to

achieve communal solidarity (Pandey 2003, 176). The idea that Muslims sacrificed everything for an Islamic state to practice their religion in peace became the common public narrative. However, there was no consensus as to what that Islamic state meant. If anything, there was a diversity and multiplicity of Islamic practices that the Muslims of Pakistan aspired for.

Moreover, Pakistan was formed out of regions that were ethnically and linguistically diverse. These regions had their own organisational structures, customs, and even local religious practices. The religiously and ethnically diverse population of the new country were unsure what the nature of the state Pakistan would be. The inherent contradictions of the idea of Pakistan were a source of fear and anxiety concerning religious and national identity. These fears were exacerbated by the doubts about Pakistan's ability to survive. There were both real and imagined threats to the security of Pakistan. India's stance that the idea of Pakistan was bound to fail instilled further fear and anxiety amongst its populace (Jalal 2014, 51-52). The state of Pakistan did not have enough resources to run the country. There were massive material and political challenges to the survival of the state (ibid.). All of these challenges in addition to the contradictions and uncertainties inherent in the idea of Pakistan left people in deep anxiety concerning their national identity.

The state of Pakistan, thus, had to come up with a coherent and unifying state policy to control and appease its population. The process of state-making, however, was not without its challenges. Interestingly, many prominent protagonists of the reform movements—such as Mawdudi of Jamaat-e-Islami—who had opposed the Pakistan movement earlier, formed their own pressure groups and political parties to mould the state policies according to their own religious ideals (Jalal 2014, 56-57). On the other hand, the leadership of the Pakistan movement—those who formed the first government of Pakistan—wanted 'Islamic modernism' as the principle of the state formation. 'Islamic state', for them, meant a democratic state that ensured equality and justice for its populace (Jalal 2014, 56; Qasmi 2011, 239-240). The religious ideologues, often in contradiction with each other, had their own ideals of the state. The clash of ideals as to what the proposed Islamic state should look like thus began soon after the creation of Pakistan. It was no longer just a matter of individuals trying to live up to the ideals of *good Muslims*, it was now also a matter of whose ideal would define the *Ideal Islamic State* that had just been created. Hence, the question for the political leaders of Pakistan at the creation of Pakistan was not whether Islam would have

a role in the state of Pakistan or not, but ‘the *kind* of Islam’ that would form the basis of the state policies (emphasis added, Qasmi 2011, 239).

Prominent historians—such as Ayesha Jalal and Barbara Metcalf—argue that Pakistan started off as a secular country but later gave in to the pressure from the Islamist groups to become a religiously defined country. However, such a conception of Pakistan’s history as a battle between secular elite and the Islamists has been criticised as an ‘exaggerated construction’ (Akhtar, Amirali and Raza 2006, 394). Instead, both the modernist elite and the religious groups claimed to represent ‘the Islamic state’ and the Islamists have challenged the ‘governments for falling short of the envisaged ideal of Islamic state’ throughout the history of Pakistan (ibid.). Hence, as Qasmi argued,

The history of Pakistan cannot be periodised between an unrestrained pendulum swing, initially in favour of “secularism” and, later, towards “Islamisation”. Rather, the history of Islam’s role in the Pakistani state during this period should be elaborated under the term “politics of Islam” which has considerable flexibility to incorporate within its ambit such issues as disruptive negotiation of contrasting religious traditions; sectional interests and ideological view of key actors; and the imperatives of populist decision-making (2011, 240).

Building upon this understanding of the ‘politics of Islam’ as crucial to state-making, I would like to further argue that religious exclusivity was inherent in the idea of Pakistan which became the basis of state policies from the very beginning. As discussed earlier, Pakistan was founded on a unifying nationalist ideology based on religious identity, with a homogenous conception of Islam and Muslims at its heart. This unifying narrative, at the same time, was exclusionary and absolute in dismissing the Hindus as inferior *others* by ignoring cultural, social, linguistic, and historical similarities with them. Such an emphasis on *exclusivity* and *unity* at the same time came to define the state-making of Pakistan after its creation. The diverse groups of Muslim and non-Muslim citizens of Pakistan were supposed to be unified under the banner of Islam while ignoring their differences. Instead of acknowledging the differences, the state aimed to suppress them through their construction of one nation, one language¹⁵, and one religion. Unity, singularity, and homogeneity became the emphasis of the nationalist project whereas the internal differences came to be regarded as ‘undesirable’.

¹⁵ The imposition of Urdu as the national language upon linguistically diverse populations was one of the major reasons for the rise of separatist movement in East Pakistan culminating in the creation of Bangladesh.

‘unacceptable’, and ‘un-Islamic’ (Nelson 2009, 604). Homogenised social identities of citizen subjects became crucial to the making of the state in Pakistan (Ali 2008, 8).

National television, textbooks, public books of history, and all other possible sources were used for the propagation of the principles of exclusivity and unity (Jalal 2014, 51-52). The history writing thus employed what Hobsbawm called the ‘invention of tradition’—a technique modern nations use to construct national history (Hobsbawm 1983, 14). The invented tradition can be ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (ibid., 1). The national history thus fashioned was replete with ideas of continuity, unity, oneness, and homogeneity. Nosheen Ali, in her study of textbook representation of religious differences in Gilgit, described the state of Pakistan as an assemblage of contested discourses and micro-practices of discipline and power. As she succinctly puts, ‘such discursive practices embody “politically organised subjection” and “moral regulation” through which the social identities of citizen-subjects are cultivated, and state rule accomplished’ (Ali 2008, 2). These discursive practices of subjection and control of differences are a common feature of modern nation-states and have been extensively theorised: for example, Bourdieu (1973) called them mechanisms of cultural reproduction, and Althusser (1971) called them ideological state apparatuses. Contemporary nation-states have been known for exercising ‘taxonomical control over difference’ by domesticating it, curbing it, and exploiting it for their interests (Appadurai 1990, 304).

The attempt to domesticate differences also led to the creation of newer forms of selfhood. As Bauman (2000) argued, ‘the more effective the drive to homogeneity and the efforts to eliminate the difference, the more difficult it is to feel at home in the face of strangers, the more threatening the difference appears and the deeper and more intense is the anxiety it breeds’ (106). In the case of Pakistan, the new anxious self of the Pakistani Muslims was constructed around the elimination of religious differences, as noted by Iqtidar (2012) in the following words,

The majority that is being created out of the diverse classes, ethnicities and other divisions within Pakistan remains elusive. But the possibility of that uniform, homogenous majority animates a specific kind of selfhood—one that is impatient with the idea of doctrinal difference even as it is increasingly confronted with the practice

of it, of more choices given the proliferation of religious groups in contemporary Pakistan (1023).

The state-making in Pakistan, however, was not a one-way project involving imposition of exclusivist policies and indoctrination from top to bottom. It went hand in hand with the modernist self-making processes that had been initiated much earlier as I have argued. Imposing a unifying narrative was in the interests of the state, but it was also a response to the public demands at times. This was because the exclusivist tendencies had already been popularised through various movements of Muslim nationalism in the pre-partition era. Thus, having separated themselves from the Hindu *others*, the Pakistani Muslims turned to look for *lesser others* amongst themselves to continue their exclusivist project. Soon after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the question of ‘Who is a Muslim?’ was raised as the authorities deliberated the state-sanctioned definition of ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’, which was also in line with what many people wanted. For example, in 1953, there were widespread protests by religious groups and common people demanding the official declaration of Ahmadis who self-claim to be Muslims as ‘non-Muslims’ (The Punjab Court of Inquiry, 1954). Three years later, in 1956, Pakistan was declared an Islamic Republic, reaffirming its Islamic identity, and leaving the questions of legitimacy and authority as to what is Islamic and who is a Muslim enduring in popular consciousness.

The following decades saw the religio-nationalist passion for exclusivity metastasise into full-fledged sectarian conflicts with widespread communal violence between different sects of Muslims. In addition to the government, the religious groups, and the common people, another player—probably the strongest—was the Pakistan army that contributed to the exclusivist tendencies in Pakistan. The decades of 70s and 80s were particularly significant in aggravating the sectarian tensions and further enabling the spread of violence against religious minorities. Three major political events during these years have been described as the cause of worsening sectarian tensions: Zia-ul-Haq’s military rule (1977-1988), the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the Afghan war (1979-1992). Zia-ul-Haq came to power through a military coup in 1977 and used popular Islamic symbols to legitimise his rule (Ahmad 1998, 14). Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamisation was seen as a form of Sunni Islamism in response to Iran’s Shi’i Islamism that culminated in the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (Nasr 2000a, 175). Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamisation Project was supported by the mainstream Sunni political parties, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, for various reasons including Zia-ul-Haq’s appeal as a good Muslim and as

an ‘embodiment of their concept of a true Islamic ruler’ (Ahmad 1998, 13). He was also supported by Saudi Arabia to promote Salafi/Deobandi—a reformist sect of Sunnis—ideology in Pakistan (through heavy funding of *Madrassahs*), mainly because they wanted to erect a ‘Sunni Wall’ around Iran (Nasr 2000a, 178) to protect their political and ideological interests in the region.

These developments coincided with the Afghan War during which the Pakistan military provided training and resources to Deobandi seminary students (Taliban) and other Sunni militant organisations such as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Harkat-ul-Ansar (Nasr 2000a, 178). These Sunni militants, supported, trained, and indoctrinated by the collaboration of U.S.A, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan fought as *mujahideen* (wagers of Holy War) against the Soviet Union (Nasr 2000a, 179). The collaboration of CIA-ISI to create militant Islamists to counter the growing Soviet influence in Afghanistan along with heavy funding for the ideological training of *mujahideen* from the Gulf region worsened the sectarian tensions (Toor 2011, 153-154). The inflow of weapons and funds during the Afghan war militarised the sectarian outfits and contributed to the violence against Shi’is in the years to come (Ahmad 1998, 28). In addition to the sectarian violence, the military was also involved in the ethnic conflicts across the country. The biggest tragedy in terms of ethnic conflict was the Bangladesh’s independence war in which the Pakistan military had a huge role to play. There have been other ethnic conflicts—such as in Baluchistan—where no *war* was declared but the military has been involved in curbing what they have been calling the separatist movements. Moreover, as Nosheen Ali shows in her study of violence against Shias in Gilgit, there have been occasions when political dissent has been portrayed as sectarian conflict to depoliticise it and eventually suppress the dissident voices (Ali 2008, 12-13).

Thus, the process of state-making in Pakistan has been a constant struggle between the civil governments, military leaders, religious groups, and common public. Some groups with leftist, progressive, and civil rights agendas have existed throughout the history of Pakistan, but they have been fringe, and often persecuted elements in the religio-political sphere of Pakistan. Some political parties, for example The Pakistan People’s party, claim to have left-leaning manifestos, but have used religious symbolism and allied with religious groups whenever it served their political interests.

Appadurai's (1990) formulation of 'the nation and the state' as 'another's projects' is a useful concept to understand the processes of state-making in Pakistan. He writes, 'nations (or more properly groups with ideas about nationhood) seek to capture or co-opt states and state power, states simultaneously seek to capture and monopolise ideas about nationhood' (Appadurai 1990, 303). He describes it as a 'disjunctive relationship between the nation and the state' which he argues is a characteristic of most states in the era of global political economy (ibid., 304). In the case of Pakistan, both the nation and the state are incomplete, and are in constant making. However, I argue that through a convergence of the focus of all the major players in this process on religious exclusivity and national unity, the possibility of differences has come to be a threat at individual, communal, and national levels. The consequence is that various groups with their own ideas of Islam and Pakistan seek to simply eliminate the differences and aberrations from their ideals to legitimise and consolidate their religio-national identity.

Conclusion

The processes of self-making, community-making, and state-making that I have discussed in this chapter have led to the present condition of Pakistani Muslims: deeply embedded in anxieties related to their religious and national identity, and constantly striving to become *good Muslims*. Naveeda Khan (2012) highlighted 'scepticism' (of the self and the other) and 'aspiration' (to become a good Muslim) as central features of everyday lives of Pakistani Muslims in her ground-breaking ethnography. Other scholars have also made similar observations. For example, Jalal contends that Pakistanis are 'a visibly perturbed' nation 'pondering the reasons for their country's perilous condition and seeking a reprieve from violence and uncertainty' (Jalal 2014, 5-6).

In this chapter, I have discussed the historical causes of the uncertainty and anxiety that pervade the individual, communal and national lives of Pakistanis. I have argued that the reformist emphasis on the purification of the self under the influence of modernity, and in response to British colonisation, gave rise to moral anxieties that were exacerbated by the inherent contradictions of the idea of Pakistan and the national identity. These anxieties are inherently related to the gap between the reality and the ideal, the lived and the imagined, and the aspired and the achieved. It is the sense of lack and inadequacy that defines the struggles of religious and national identity of Pakistanis. Sidel aptly captures it in the context of his study of 'religious violence' in Indonesia,

At the core of any “identity” is always a constitutive sense of lack, of inadequacy, or of a ‘theft’ that can be imputed to an Other who deprives “us” of the full enjoyment of those material, discursive, and social practices, which, we imagine, (would) allow “us” to be fully “ourselves” (Sidel 2006, 137).

The ‘politics of Islam’ by various players involved in the state-making created the conditions for violent expression of these anxieties by promoting exclusivist national ideology. It is not certainty of the religious identity but doubt of it, not uniformity of religious ideas but multiplicity of them, that enable violent exclusion of others possible. As Sidel writes,

Religious violence should be understood as reflecting not the strength and solidity of religious faiths, identities and solidarities, but their perceived fragility and vulnerability in the face of alternative, competing—religious and non-religious—forms of consciousness, association and mobilisation (2006, 141).

The case of Pakistan, despite its historical specificities, is not unique as the issues of sameness and difference, particular and universal, lived and ideal are common to all societies. Especially in the modern global world, ‘the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular’ are a pertinent challenge for all societies, and the struggle between sameness and difference is ‘the central feature of global culture today’ (Appadurai 1990, 308). In fact, the globalisation itself is a source of enhanced anxieties for the people and the nations (ibid.). In the case of Pakistan, globalisation has not only exposed Pakistanis to a world of thoughts and ideas often conflicting and challenging their own, but also positioned them on an international stage where they must constantly defend their national image. The global image of Muslims in the wake of association of terrorism with Islam and the notoriety of Pakistan as a fundamentalist nation directly impact the lives of Pakistani Muslims even if they have never travelled outside Pakistan. They constantly feel under attack and threatened by the West and their civilisation, their influence on the local ways of life, and are on the lookout for the enemy within. The threat from the West in the wake of globalisation is in addition to the threats already felt from the rival nation—India—and from ethnic and religious differences within the state of Pakistan. The global image of Islam and Pakistan is an added concern to the already existing anxieties concerning the national and religious identity of the Pakistanis. Hence, there are multiple identities that Pakistani Muslims navigate in their everyday lives: the pan-Islamic identity, the sectarian identities, the national identity, and the ethnic identities. Some of these identities conflict with each other; for example, a Sunni Muslim feels strongly Sunni in relation to Shias or other minority sects but feels strongly Muslim in relation to the rest of the world in the context of the global image of Islam. The shifting identities of the

Pakistani Muslims, however, are a cause of uncertainty and anxiety that characterise their individual and collective lives.

I have argued in this chapter that the blasphemy-related violence in contemporary Pakistan should be seen in the historical context of the development of Pakistani self, society and the state. The historical analysis has showed that the issue of blasphemy is embedded in the popular consciousness and cannot be understood to have originated in the legal amendments of the 1980s. It is the popular consciousness that connects the case of Ilmuddin from the 1920s to the present-day anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan. The discussion of Ilmuddin's case and other controversies around holy symbols demonstrated that the popular consciousness transcends the law of the state of Pakistan and derives its legitimacy from wider cultural symbolism. The popular consciousness, however, is not static as it has evolved with the development of nationalist movement for Pakistan and the exclusivist state policies since the creation of Pakistan. It is therefore a multiplicity of historical factors—Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation being *one* of them—that have led to the widespread anxieties and uncertainties amongst the Pakistani Muslims. These anxieties find expression in various forms of religious exclusion, including anti-blasphemy violence, in the present-day Pakistan.

Chapter 4 - Religious Discourse Concerning Blasphemy: Politics of Uncertainty and Legitimacy

*Batla do gustaakh-e-nabi ko, ghairat-e-Sunni zindaa hai
Deen pe mar mitnay ka jazba, kal bhi tha aur aaj bhi hai!*

Tell the blasphemer of the Prophet, the honour of Sunnis is alive
We always had the passion to die for our religion, and still have it!

*Jaag uthay hain ahl-e-sunnat, goonj utha ye naara hai
Door hatto aye dushman-e-millat, Pakistan humara hai!*

Ahl-e-Sunnat (Sunnis) have awakened, and their slogan is echoing:
Get out of the way, O enemy of the nation! Pakistan belongs to us.

*Sunnio, apnay aap ko ghair syasi kehna chor do,
Ab baat namoos-e-risaalat ki hai*

O Sunnis, stop calling yourselves apolitical,
It is about the Prophet's honour now!

These are some of the slogans that have been popular amongst various Sunni groups, particularly the Barelwis, over the past decade or so. Arising as a reformist movement in colonial India, the Barelwis—largest section of Sunni Muslims in Pakistan—have always played a political role in the history of Pakistan through street protests, lobbies, and coalitions (I. Khan 2011, 61; Philippon 2014). However, they have become increasingly politicised since the 2000s, actively defending ‘their religious identity and heritage’ (Epping 2013, 1). Barelwis have been a popular target of sectarian violence—such as bombing of their shrines and religious celebrations—at the hands of Deobandis, another Sunni reformist group (I. Khan 2011, 64). Barelwis’ increased political activism is therefore often understood as a response to Deobandi militancy against them (Epping 2013; I. Khan 2011). It has also been argued that the rise of Barelwi activism is a direct result of post 9/11 institutionalisation of Barelwi Islam by the government in an attempt to combat Deobandi terrorist outfits whom the government and the military had sponsored earlier (Suleman 2018). Nevertheless, today Barelwis are at the frontlines of campaigns to defend the honour of the Prophet and punish all blasphemers.

While scholars of almost all sects, schools of thought, and religious groups in contemporary Pakistan¹⁶ support the mandatory death punishment for an alleged blasphemer, the Sunni Barelwi groups have particularly established the issue of blasphemy as the pivotal point of their political claims in the recent past. They have positively aligned the ideology of Pakistan with the aim of defending the honour of the Prophet, as indicated by the following slogan:

*Pakistan ka matlab kya? La illaha illallah
Dastoor-e-reyasat kya hoga? Muhammad ur Rasool Allah*

What does Pakistan mean? There is no God but Allah
What shall the principle of our state be? Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah

The first line is popularly known to be the political slogan of the Pakistan Movement in the pre-partition campaign for a separate homeland for Muslims (Butt 2016, 11)¹⁷. The second line is an extension recently introduced by the Sunni Barelwi groups engaged in anti-blasphemy campaigns. It is a claim as to what ‘the idea of Pakistan’ means and how it should be implemented by the state. As discussed in the previous chapter, the process of state formation in Pakistan has always been characterised by competing ideas of nationhood and the state. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how certain groups are (re)imagining and campaigning *their* ideas of the state of Pakistan, participating in the ongoing ‘battle of imagination’ (Appadurai 1990, 303-304). The love of the Prophet Muhammad and defence of his honour have come to be central to the present ideas of nationhood amongst the religious groups.

In this chapter I will discuss the popularisation of religious discourse concerning blasphemy amongst the Sunni groups vying for power in the shared religious and political spheres. I argue that the religious leaders and scholars have popularised an absolutist discourse concerning blasphemy and its punishment to gain political legitimacy and religious authority

¹⁶ There have been some attempts to challenge the dominant interpretations concerning the punishment of blasphemy from within the religious traditions, but they remain minority voices without much support. A religious scholar, Javed Ahmed Ghamidi, questioned the existing law and argued that it is not in accordance with Quran, but he had to flee Pakistan for his life. Currently, Arafat Mazhar, a young scholar is involved in challenging the religious scholars and inviting them to debate the theological basis of punishment of a blasphemer (Alvi 2015; Mazhar 2018).

¹⁷ However, researchers have shown that this slogan was not supported by the leadership of the Pakistan movement, and that it was under Zia-ul-Haq’s regime that this slogan was written into history as *the* slogan of the Pakistan movement (Paracha 2013; Wasti 2009, 4-5).

for themselves, granting certain symbolic meaning and significance to the issue of blasphemy in the process. This symbolic meaning is then harnessed by more individuals and groups to gain influence, legitimacy, and power in the religio-political domain. The symbolic power of blasphemy works by generating certain affective responses from the believers, through their bodily and sensory experiences as well as their devotion to the cause. Thus, I contend that the popular religious discourse concerning blasphemy should be understood within the context of power struggle between religious scholars, the meaning it holds for the believers, and the affective responses it generates.

I start with a discussion of affect, meaning, and power with an aim to outline my theoretical approach in this chapter. The rest of the chapter is sub-divided into two major sections. The first section discusses the contemporary dominant religious discourse of the major religious groups active in anti-blasphemy campaigns. The contemporary religious discourse concerning blasphemy refers to a number of sources including the modern Islamic philosopher-poet, Muhammad Iqbal, and the traditional Islamic juristic literature. I discuss the significance of these sources and their invocation by contemporary religious scholars. The discussion in this section shows that the contemporary discourse on blasphemy is centred around the ideas of love for the Prophet and punishment of blasphemy, both perceived and enacted in bodily terms.

The second section highlights the role of religious authority and its politics in constructing and propagating the contemporary religious discourse concerning blasphemy, its punishment and the specific expressions of love of the Prophet. I begin by highlighting the change in the nature of religious authority in the modern Pakistan over the past decades. I then describe the political competition and struggle for legitimacy amidst the rising uncertainty that characterises the present religious authority in Pakistan. Through an analysis of the politics of three religious parties in particular I argue that the current dominant religious discourse is shaped by simultaneous absolutism and multiplication of religious claims made by those vying for religious and political legitimacy.

Affect, Meaning, and Power: An Integrative Approach

*There is only one punishment for the blasphemer of the Prophet
Beheading, beheading!
O blasphemer of Muhammad! You are not safe anymore
We will lay down our hearts and our bodies for the sake of the honour of the Prophet
(We) Muslims will behead all the blasphemers!*

This is the chorus from a *Na'at* (a song in the praise of the Prophet) often played in anti-blasphemy gatherings and protests. The first two lines are also used as a slogan, chanted, printed, and sung by anti-blasphemy campaigners—particularly the Sunni Barelwis. The original video of the song, sung by Aftab Qadri, shows a young bearded man in embroidered attire and a glittery turban standing in front of trees lit by fairy lights, singing the above lines to very catchy tunes and rhythmic beat of music¹⁸. The singer begins with an extremely passionate recitation to warn the blasphemers of the power of Muslims' faith and love for the Prophet. The vocals and the music invoke certain visceral responses by creating a sense of urgency and instilling a sense of empowerment. While listening to the *Na'at*, I experienced an increased heart rate and felt a surge of energy course through my body. After listening to it a few times, I was also sub-consciously humming the chorus. No wonder it is a popular slogan and is used in religious gatherings to generate affective responses from the crowds.

Affective responses are understood by psychologist Tomkins (2009) as the 'primary innate biological motivating mechanism' (163). Affects are thus understood as non-linguistic and non-ideological aspects of human behaviour related to senses and bodily processes that are not entirely located in consciousness. My heart rate increasing while listening to the *Na'at* mentioned earlier was thus an affect—my body's natural reaction to the aural experience—even though the words being uttered had no meaning for me. Brian Massumi, a leading affect theorist, distinguished between affects and emotions arguing that affects are purely sub-conscious and autonomous whereas emotions are imbued with meaning (2002, 30-35). Affects are argued to have an intensity of their own that can produce certain effects and motivations in individuals and groups of people (ibid.).

¹⁸ The video can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyPmYFVefr8>

Such an understanding of affect has been criticised as anti-intentionalist, giving an autonomous and pre-personal existence to ‘affect’ as a ‘natural’ element of the human body, rather than constructed within social conditions (Leys 2011, 470). Leys argues that affect theory discerns affects as ‘inhuman’, ‘pre-subjective’, ‘visceral’ forces and ‘intensities that influence our thinking and judgments but are separate from these’ (437). In her view, affect theorists put an almost excessive emphasis on bodily and corporeal processes stripped of meaning and social conditions, to counter the post-structuralist theory’s obsession with meaning, ideology, and discourse (440-441). The resulting theory then sees,

the subject’s affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes “too late” for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behaviour usually accorded to them. The result is that action and behaviour are held to be determined by affective dispositions that are independent of consciousness and the mind’s control (ibid., 444).

The disconnect between ideology and affect thus underplays the role of ideas and beliefs in people’s behaviour and motivations (ibid., 451). Even though the *Na’at* about beheading the blasphemers evoked some physical response in me, it did not produce any *motivation* because I do not subscribe to the ideas being presented. Therefore, I agree with Leys’ criticism of affects as the ‘primary innate biological motivating mechanism’ devoid of meaning. The physical responses certainly have a role to play in individual and collective life; for example, participants of anti-blasphemy protests respond with a certain fervour to Arabic and Persian recitations—languages most of them do not understand but associate a religious value with. The sensory experience of hearing recitations, music, and poetry in religious gatherings does indeed produce certain affective responses. However, the biological responses alone cannot produce motivations and judgements.

The symbolic meaning associated with the Arabic and Persian recitations is what turns the biological responses into devotion. While I can be sub-consciously drawn into humming the chorus mentioned earlier, I do not automatically feel motivated to act upon it. Nor does the sound of the chorus autonomously produce any devotion in me. For the people participating in the anti-blasphemy protests, on the other hand, the same chorus not only produces devotion and motivation, but may also leads them to act upon it and kill the alleged blasphemers. They are already committed to an ideology or set of ideas—seen as secondary by affect theorists—that generate passionate reactions. Thus, I see affect as crucial to understanding the dominant discourse on blasphemy, but only in conjunction with the meaning transmitted through this

discourse. Affect, in my understanding, *adds intensity to the meaning* instead of meaning adding purpose to the intensity. That is, the affect—or intensity—is not prior to the meaning. The intensity generated by the affect, however, turns ideas into passions and meaning into embodied devotion.

Geertz emphasised the significance of symbolic meaning in producing religious ‘moods and motivations’ (1993, 90). He understood religion as a system of interconnected symbols that give meaning to religious experience. He defined religion as:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (ibid.).

I follow the Geertzian concept of symbolic meaning to understand how religious discourse creates certain moods and motivations in the supporters of anti-blasphemy violence. Thus, I will analyse the popular religious discourse concerning blasphemy with attention to the affect *and* the meaning that it engenders amongst believers.

While Geertz (1993) acknowledged that religion as a system of symbols is also related to ‘socio-structural and psychological processes’ (125) and is culturally specific (123), Asad (1983) criticised him for ignoring the role of power in determining historically specific understandings and experiences of religion. Emphasising the role of historical power relations and processes, Asad argues that we should pay attention to ‘the conditions (discursive and non-discursive) which help to explain how symbols come to be constructed, and how some of them are established as natural or authoritative as opposed to others’ (240). I agree with Asad’s emphasis on the role of power in the construction of meaning. In this chapter, I focus on the discursive construction of the symbolic meaning of blasphemy—following a long tradition of Foucauldian discourse analysis. For Foucault, discourse means whatever determines the way in which at a given point in history, one can think, speak or write about a social object or a practice (Foucault 1971, 8). Discourse is historically specific and grounded in the socio-political context, which implies that in a given context, reality or truth is the function of what can be thought, written, or said at a given point in time (ibid., 15). The historical circumstances are the conditions of possibility that constrain discursive formations. Therefore, social imagination is determined by a particular set of material conditions and their representations at any given point in history (Foucault 2002, 145). Following this conception,

I understand the symbolic meaning of blasphemy as constructed discursively within the context of power relations.

However, I also argue that the symbols thus constructed may attain power of their own and can empower more people in their course. Therefore, as Geertz pointed out in an interview in response to Asad's critique, the religious symbols cannot be *reduced* to power relations (Micheelsen 2002, 8-9). While power relations determine which symbols become important and what meaning they hold, the symbols also provide meaning for those concerned and generate for them certain affects at the same time. While the religious discourse concerning blasphemy in the present-day Pakistan has obvious political undertones and is a product of specific historical and political circumstances, it also provides *affective meaning* to those involved in the discourse, whether they are religious scholars or ordinary people. Thus, I contend, power relations and (affective) meaning cannot be entirely separated from each other; rather they share a dialectic relationship where power creates (affective) meaning and meaning can grant power in turn. The discussion of the dominant religious discourse in the first section of this chapter is mostly concerned with the *affective meaning* that this discourse holds for the believers. In the second section, through a discussion of the role of religious authority and political motivations that determine the religious discourse concerning blasphemy, I will demonstrate, in line with Asad's argument, that historically specific power relations determine religious symbols, as well as moods and motivations they produce in the people.

The Dominant Religious Discourse Concerning Blasphemy

Despite a general consensus amongst the religious groups on the punishment of an alleged blasphemer, there is a proliferation of literature and speeches on the issue of blasphemy. I studied more than 50 book-length publications from Islamic scholars of all major sects and religious groups on the topic of blasphemy. The religious publications that I studied include (semi)fictional stories as well as non-fiction interpretational texts concerning blasphemy. The (semi)fictional stories—such as the novelette *Shaalam* (blasphemer) by Mukhtar Alam—revolve around stories of blasphemers. These stories almost always start from their birth as 'illegitimate' children. The story-lines lead up to the offence of blasphemy or *Tauheen-e-risaalat* (insult of the Prophet) committed by them and their *ibrat-naak anjaam* (horrifying destiny) at the hands of the 'heroes' or *Aashiqan-e-rasool* (lovers of the Prophet) who kill

them. These stories are imbued with passion and are a source of affective meaning for the people who read them and believe in them.

A pattern can also be drawn out of the interpretational texts in terms of structure and content of these publications. Most publications include the following components in one way or the other: The centrality of love for Prophet Muhammad to Muslims' faith, examples of love for the Prophet from Prophet's companions and later Muslims, absolute authority of the Prophet, Quranic and Prophetic traditions regarding punishing those who insult or question the Prophet, what actions, words, gestures, and attitudes constitute insult to the Prophet, examples of 'blasphemers' who met their destined 'horrific' deaths at the hands of Muslims, characteristics of the blasphemers, and blasphemy as a conspiracy of the West/non-Muslims/Jews/anti-Islam forces to undermine the religion of Islam. These texts are also written in a passionate language and are sources of emotional as well as ideological meaning for the readers.

In addition to the Quranic references and Prophetic traditions, many of these publications also include verses from the modernist South Asian philosopher-poet, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, who is commonly known to be a passionate lover of the Prophet and the visionary of Pakistan. Specifically, his verses dealing with the love of the Prophet, and the call for Muslims to be active against the enemy—the colonial forces at the time he was writing—are cited. Not surprisingly, the same topics and references were popular in religious sermons, speeches made at protests, and were highlighted by the religious scholars during my interviews with them. Based on the religious publications, sermons, speeches, and my interviews with the religious scholars, I will discuss some of the key themes mentioned above that make up the prevailing discourse on blasphemy and its punishment in Pakistan. I will begin with the discourse of contemporary scholars from three religious groups and then discuss the religious sources or Islamic juristic literature to which they refer.

The religious scholars that I refer to are also active politicians. In fact, most of the religious groups and organisations actively engaged in the anti-blasphemy campaigns in Pakistan are political parties at the same time. Some of them have been political parties since the conception of Pakistan and played an active role in achieving the anti-blasphemy laws of Pakistan as they exist today; others have entered the political scene much more recently through specific rallying around the issue of blasphemy. I will focus on three of these

religious political parties—formed at different stages in the history of Pakistan—who are currently engaged in the anti-blasphemy discourse around the country. Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Pakistan was formed in 1941, Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) was formed in 1989, and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) was formed in 2015. All three of these parties belong to the Sunni sect, with PAT and TLP representing the Barelwi sub-sect of Sunni Islam.

Love for the Prophet Muhammad

*Ki Muhammad se wafa' a tu ne tou hum teray hain
Ye jahan cheez hai kya, Loh-o-qalam teray hain*

*Be loyal to Muhammad, and you will have me on your side;
The world is nothing, you will command My Pen of Destiny.*

(Allama Muhammad Iqbal, 1913)

The above verse was written by Iqbal in his poem *Jawab-e-Shikwa* (God's answer to Muslims' complaint), which was a sequel to his poem *Shikwa* (The complaint). Together, these poems are in the format of a dialogue with God. In the first one, Iqbal complained about the miserable situation of Muslims in the sub-continent and beyond despite being the followers of the rightful religion. In the second part, God responds to highlight the shortcomings of Muslims that are responsible for their abject condition in the world and offers ways to rectify that. The verse quoted above is the closing couplet of the second poem. Thus, loyalty to Muhammad is argued to be the answer to all of Muslims' problems in the contemporary world. This couplet is one of the most popular references to Iqbal's poetry made by the anti-blasphemy campaigners in present-day Pakistan. The meaning of the couplet engenders intense passion amongst the believers. The couplet by Iqbal is quoted in books, recited in sermons, and has also been sung as a *Na'at* in the praise of the Prophet. The verses are employed to argue that love of the Prophet and faithfulness to him are the most powerful tools in the hands of the Muslims. The love of the Prophet is what distinguishes them from the rest of the world and is the only way to achieve success and power.

The figure of Prophet Muhammad has been a popular subject of devotional literature in most Muslims societies (see e.g., Asani, Abdel-Malek and Schimmel 1995). However, while the centrality of the Prophet Muhammad in a Muslim's faith is common to most sects and sub-sects of Muslims in Pakistan, the Barelwis have been known for their exceptional devotion and passionate attachment to the personality of Muhammad. For Barelwis, 'a true Muslim is

an “Ashiq-e-Rasool”, or a “Lover of the Prophet,”” who is ‘obligated to protect the sanctity of the Prophet’ (I. Khan 2011, 60). The Prophet is the spiritual axis of faith as well as the perfect role model for living in this world. Even mentioning the name of the Prophet invokes affective and emotional responses—such as lowering the gaze—because of the meaning attached to the personality of the Prophet. However, this is precisely the concern for which different Barelwi groups compete amongst each other—and against other sub-sects of Sunnis—in the shared religio-political sphere. The following discussion deals specifically with the popular ideas of love of the Prophet amongst the Sunni Barelwi groups in Pakistan.

One of the senior lecturers at Minhaj-ul-Quran—a Sunni Barelwi religious institute affiliated with PAT—who teaches post-graduate students and prided himself in having supervised many theses told me that the starting point of my PhD thesis should be the different conception of the Prophet in Islam as compared to ‘the West’. He emphasised the ‘relative concept of prophethood’ and the ‘different concept of insult in Islam as compared to other religions’ as crucial to understanding the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan. He said,

Our conception of the Prophet is very different from that of the West for whom their Prophets¹⁹ are just like other human beings. For us, Prophet Muhammad is not merely a human being. He is a transcendental spiritual being; with the highest status even amongst the spiritual beings. An insult against human beings cannot be compared to insult against the highest spiritual being—our Prophet Muhammad.

According to him, insult of the Prophet is not merely hate-speech—a Western concept that he mentioned—rather it is the most serious sin. When I asked him to elaborate why it is the most serious sin, he responded,

Because our faith is based upon unconditional love for the Prophet Muhammad. It is what sets us apart from other religions. This love is the condition of our faith; one cannot be a Muslim if one does not hold the Prophet Muhammad in the highest reverence and dearer than his own life, wealth, family, and children. The unconditional love demands that we do not tolerate even a little doubt on the personality of Muhammad and the religion he brought to us.

Interestingly, similar arguments about the different conception of the Prophet in Islam as compared to the West and the different understanding of insult to the Prophet in contrast to

¹⁹ Referring to Christianity and Judaism mainly

the Western notion of hate-speech have also been made by anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2009) in her work on Muslims' reaction to the Danish cartoons. She argued that there is a different 'modality of attachment' between a devout Muslim and the Prophet Muhammad, embedded in a different 'economy of signification' (Mahmood 2009, 76). In this economy of signification, Prophet Muhammad is 'a figure of immanence in his constant exemplariness, and is therefore not a referential sign that stands apart from an essence that it denotes' (ibid.). The moral injury thus experienced, upon insult to the Prophet, 'emanates not from the judgment that "the law" has been transgressed but from the perception that one's being, grounded as it is in a relationship of dependency with the Prophet, has been shaken' (ibid., 78). Hence, she argued that the moral outrage of Muslims in response to the insult of the Prophet is embedded in their unique religious ethos that is qualitatively different from that of the Western societies.

However, the supposedly unique ways of attaching to the Prophet, the distinctly Muslim ethos, is very hard to define. In fact, it is one of the major points of difference between various groups and sects within Islam. Barelwis and Deobandis, for example, passionately disagree on the nature of the Prophet's existence and appropriate modes of attachment to him. The former believe that Prophet is not only a physical existence, rather he is a part of the *noor* (light) of God that existed before anything else was created and will last beyond everything in the universe, and by virtue of this spiritual existence, the Prophet's physical death does not mark his disappearance from the world—he is all present and existing (I. Khan 2011, 59). The latter, on the other hand, believe that while Muhammad was a Prophet of Allah, he was a human being like all other human beings who died a physical death after fulfilling the role he was assigned to play (ibid.). They believe that the conception of Muhammad as anything more than a human being elevates his status to divinity and this corrupts the monotheistic spirit of Islam (ibid.).

While all sects agree on the authority of Muhammad and respect for him, the different conception of the nature of Prophet also entails distinct ways of attachment to the Prophet and display of love for him. One group's way of respecting the Prophet may be seen as an insult by the other group, and vice versa. Therefore, the Sunni Barelwis and Deobandis/Wahabbis/Salafis/Ahl-e-Hadith are engaged in accusing each other of blasphemy. Even amongst the Barelwis, there are different conceptions of how to love the Prophet. The love for the Prophet, thus, becomes the domain where they actively compete against each

other, in order to establish themselves as more authentic lovers of the Prophet than others. Thus, while they all agree on the centrality of the Prophet Muhammad to Muslims' faith, they contest each other on what the appropriate reverence accorded to the Prophet must look like, and by corollary, the understandings of what is blasphemous and what is not. Here I will only discuss in detail some of the examples of 'how to love the Prophet' as promulgated by the two Barelwi groups: PAT and TLP.

Despite their beliefs concerning the *spiritual* aspects of Muhammad's existence, the Sunni Barelwis put an almost obsessive emphasis on the reverence of the *physical* being of Muhammad. The love of the Prophet in the present world, for them, is marked by imitating the physical features of the Prophet (for example, facial hair), eating what he ate, drinking what he drank, and living the life as closely as possible to what he did. There are numerous traditions of the Prophet referred to in everyday lives of Pakistani Muslims concerning these aspects of his life. The standards of love for the Prophet are set by his companions who lived in his time, according to the prevalent religious discourse amongst Sunni Barelwis. They quote acts of reverence accorded to the Prophet by his companions to set forth a model for the believers who are supposed to love the Prophet more than their own lives, families, and wealth. One such example of the companions' reverence for the Prophet narrated by Tahir ul Qadri—the founder of PAT—is as follows:

The companions of the Prophet highly revered anything associated with the Prophet and everything that came in contact with his Holy body. Urwa bin Mas'ood, who converted to Islam, narrated: "By God, he (the Prophet Muhammad) would spit and his companions would collect it on the palms of their hands and rub it on their faces." Whenever any discharge from Prophet Muhammad's mouth or nose dripped, his companions would rush towards him to collect it on their hands and rub it on their faces and bodies. Now, we must pay attention to who was indulged in these acts: it was (the three Caliphs) Hazrat Abu-Bakr Siddique, Hazrat Umar Farooq, Hazrat Ali and fifteen hundred other companions of the Prophet... The Prophet did not stop them, neither did any revelation from Allah. How could it be stopped? This intense passionate relationship with the prophet is the very spirit of the faith—the truth of the faith—that was well acknowledged by the companions of the Prophet (2013, 49).

Other similar examples narrate how the companions would not let the used water from the Prophet's ablution go to waste, how they kept the Prophet's hair from falling to the ground, how their eyes looked down and their voices stayed low in the presence of the Prophet, and so on. The reverence of the Prophet is often talked about in terms of *ghulaami* (literal meaning: slavery) of the Prophet as the ideal to be achieved and a source of pride for his followers.

Qadri writes, ‘Destroying one’s self in the Prophet’s slavery is the only complete faith and crossing all limits in his respect and veneration is the true devotion to the Prophet, and devotion is the pinnacle of faith’ (2013, 52). Thus, there is an emphasis on complete devotion to the Prophet—not only in thoughts but also through the body. A lover of the Prophet submits to the Prophet cognitively, physically, and affectively—all at the same time.

Allama Khadin Hussain Rizvi, the leader of TLP, while addressing a crowd at the death anniversary of Amir Cheema—a young engineering student who died in 2006 in a prison in Germany after attempting to assassinate Roger Köppel who was editor of the German daily *Die Welt* that published cartoons of Muhammad—gave an example of crossing the limits. He narrated the story of a woman who drank Prophet Muhammad’s urine, and then went on to describe its ‘delightful’ taste and smell as priceless. He called it the ‘blind love for the Prophet Muhammad’, and aroused the crowd by rhetorically asking them what *they* had done to show their love for the Prophet? The crowd was impassioned, and chanted slogans of praise and reverence for the act of drinking the Prophet’s urine. In his speech, Rizvi asserted that in the present day, giving one’s life to protect the honour of the Prophet Muhammad is the ultimate act of love, as shown by Amir Cheema, Mumtaz Qadri, and many others who died while guarding the honour of the Prophet. Those present in the crowd raised their hands and registered their physical presence to reaffirm that they were willing to lay down their bodies in the love of the Prophet.

The emphasis on love for the holy Prophet as a bodily practice appears to be the underlying theme of notions of love for the Prophet, especially amongst the Sunni Barelwis²⁰. This understanding of love is connected to biological processes, from identifying with the body of the beloved in certain ways, revering their bodily fluids, to sacrificing one’s own body for the sake of the beloved. Similar examples of embodied devotion have been cited in wider literature on Sufi practices in South Asia (e.g. Werbner and Basu 1998, 10). Parallels can be drawn with the emphasis on bodily practices with respect to the holy in South Asian religious communities in general. Particularly, in Hinduism, the notion of holy is overtly manifested in the physical world. From using cow’s dung to consecrate physical spaces to drinking cow’s

²⁰ Similar notions are found in Shi’i conceptions of love for the holy persons in Pakistan, as well as in some other sects.

urine for purifying purposes, the relationship between the ordinary (profane) and the holy (sacred) is conceived in terms of physiological and bodily processes (Korom 2000, 193-195). The centrality of the notions of purity to such a conception of love for the holy is also of significance²¹. It is the holy that can not only transcend the normally perceived boundaries of the pure and impure but also purify the impure. If the impure crosses the boundary, it is a transgression. However, what is normally perceived as impure—such as urine—is not only pure but also purifying when it comes from the holy body.

Muslims in Pakistan widely condemn Hindus' practices such as drinking the urine of the cow, but at the same time, at least some groups, glorify the act of drinking the Prophet Muhammad's urine. It can be argued that such a conception of the love for the Prophet has developed within the South Asian culture and draws upon the same ideas of physicality, sacredness, and purity as the Hindus. The Barelwi Muslims, while claiming to oppose the Hindu rituals, themselves subscribe to the notions of purity and holiness as embedded in bodily processes. There is another significance of relating to the Prophet—or any other holy symbol—through bodily practice: it is visible to the others and therefore is an act of *public* performance. It is within the public sphere that it becomes a marker of identity, embedded in the body—or death of the body. The ways of loving the Prophet are thus embodied techniques of the self, as they enable the individuals to discover *meaning* for their own selves and establish the purity of their selves in contrast to *others* at the same time. I will discuss the assertion of the self through the desire for purity in more depth in later chapters. For now, it suffices to say that the religious discourse concerning the love of the Prophet amongst the Sunni Barelwis reflects not only the centrality of this love to the Muslims' faith but also its embeddedness in the bodily and corporeal practices. The emphasis on the body adds intensity to the meaning and inculcates embodied devotion. It is through the body that the love for the Prophet must be expressed, and an offence against the Prophet must also be avenged such that the body of the offender bears the punishment. It is visible to the world and a clear sign—engraved in the bodies of the avenger (lover of the Prophet) as well as the offender (blasphemer)—of the pious *self* as distinct from the *other*.

²¹ While Dumont's (1980) thesis on purity and impurity as the primary basis of caste system in India has been challenged (see e.g. Marglin 1977; Olivelle 1998), the significance of the ideas of purity and impurity to the South Asian cultures is generally acknowledged.

‘Religious Sources’ Concerning the Punishment of Blasphemy in Popular Discourse

As mentioned earlier, religious scholars from all schools of thought in present-day Pakistan agree that whoever insults the Prophet Muhammad must be killed. Most accusations that include insulting anything related to the religion of Islam, its dominant understanding and practices, and even authority of the religious scholars, can be framed as *Tauheen-e-Risaalat* (insult to the Prophet). According to the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), religious offences other than the insult to the Prophet Muhammad are punishable by life imprisonment and fines instead of death. However, in the popular discourse, such distinctions are hardly made, and the death penalty is promoted for a wide range of offences. For example, in justifying the murder of Salman Taseer, who did not directly insult the Prophet Muhammad but questioned the misuse of anti-blasphemy laws against religious minorities, the religious scholars described his crime as insulting the ‘law of the God’. They argued that it was in effect an insult to the Prophet. Consequently, the popular term used to rally against Taseer for his offence was *Tauheen-e-Risaalat*. Similarly, the religious scholars have described acts as various as insulting the beard, criticising the army of Pakistan, and supporting religious minorities as *Tauheen-e-Risaalat*. Thus, almost anything can be subsumed as an insult to the Prophet, deserving the death punishment.

The religious scholars refer to various sources from Quran and Hadith literature to support their point that anyone who insults the Prophet must be killed. Reference to these sources adds authenticity to the *meaning* for people. Tahir-ul-Qadri, in his book *Tahhafuz-e-namoos-e-risaalat* (Defending the Honour of the Prophet) refers to Quranic verse Al-Ahzab 33:61

مَلْعُونِينَ ۖ أَيَّامًا تُقْفَوْنَ أُخْدُوا وَقُتِلُوا تَقْتِيلًا

They shall be cursed from all around and they shall be ruthlessly killed wherever they are seized.²²

In his interpretation of this verse, Qadri writes:

²² There are multiple translations and interpretations of the verses of Quran, which I am not concerned with here. My aim is not to confirm or contest the authenticity of the interpretations but to highlight the prevalent discourse.

Thus, the Almighty is saying, “O man! Don’t show any empathy or leniency towards those who insult the sacred personality of my beloved (Prophet Muhammad). Don’t allow them any sort of consideration because they have gone miles away from my mercy; rather have become totally devoid of it. So, where and whenever you find them, destroy their irreverent existence. Because even my merciful nature cannot tolerate their obscenities against my beloved. I cannot bear fearless existence of their filthy bodies on my pure and sacred land.” (2013, 21-22)

He further comments on the choice of words by ‘the Almighty’ in the abovementioned Quranic verse. He asserts that the last two words [وَقُتِّلُوا تَقْتِيلًا] are a repetition of the Arabic word for *killing* which implies that not only should the blasphemers be killed, but ‘they should be killed as is the right to be killed’, that is, ‘as brutally as possible’. Once again, through an emphasis on the physical act of killing, the meaning of punishment is intensified. Qadri goes on to argue that this Quranic verse forms the basis of the ‘eternal, indispensable law of God’ concerning the punishment of a blasphemer and no human being can make even a slight change in it (Qadri 2013, 22). He argues that this is a *Hadd* (mandatorily enforced) law rather than a *Tazeer* (discretionary) law. He defines *Hadd* as a punishment ‘prescribed by Allah, that cannot be amended or altered by anyone except Allah’ (ibid., 25). Hence, he argues, there is no room for forgiveness of a blasphemer. One of the senior scholars at Jamaat-e-Islami headquarters described a similar position to me in the following words:

It is not possible to forgive the blasphemer. The biggest example is the conquest of Mecca when the Prophet forgave everyone except those who had committed blasphemy. Even if one is himself sinful, it is mandatory to punish the blasphemer. One’s sins can be forgiven by Allah, not practicing Islam properly is a personal matter between him and Allah. However, not believing and insulting the religion of Islam is an unpardonable sin.

A similar distinction between lesser sins (related to the practice of faith) and the ultimate sin (insulting the religion and Prophet) is drawn by Qadri. He argues, if one practices every component of Islam faithfully but does not appropriately revere the Prophet, he remains an infidel. On the other hand, one who does not practice Islam properly, but his/her heart is filled with the love of the Prophet, is still a Muslim and has hope for salvation from sins. The former is *Kharij-al-i’maan* (outside the circle of Islam) and the latter is *Na’qas-al-i’maan* (incomplete in faith) (Qadri 2013, 35). He also suggests that blasphemy is equal to infidelity and apostasy. In effect, it means that the private practice of faith is treated differently to the insult or denunciation of the religion—which is carried out in the public sphere. The insult of religion or the Prophet is treated as a *public offence* that is subject to regulation and

punishment by the community. Hurting *the religious feelings of others* is therefore the ultimate offence.

However, in his commentary on 295 A, the clause of Penal Code according to which anyone can be punished for insulting any other person's religion or religious feelings, Qadri also argues that the punishment for hurting *religious feelings of non-Muslims* is *Tazeer* but for hurting *Muslims' religious feelings* is a *Hadd*. This is because, 'when it comes to the insult of Prophet Muhammad, it no more remains an issue of hurting Muslims' feelings; it becomes an issue of destabilising Islam... and only Islam is the religion of truth in the present world whereas all other religions are either false, adulterated, or obsolete' (ibid., 29). An insult to Islam and the Prophet of Islam is therefore a threat to the *public order* as perceived by Muslims. Similar arguments are made by other religious scholars. A senior scholar of Jamaat-e-Islami with a doctorate in Islamic Studies, said in an interview with me:

There are several such cases within the lifetime of the Prophet that demonstrate that neither the Prophet nor Allah tolerated anyone who insulted the Prophet or questioned his authority. Even in the Quran, Allah says, whoever hurt my beloved Prophet will be damned in the world as well as in the hereafter. In another place in the Quran, Allah says, kill the blasphemers wherever you find them. The Prophet did not punish those who took it upon themselves to kill the blasphemers. It doesn't matter if those killers (lovers of the Prophet) practice the religion properly or not or offer their prayers or not.

There are plenty of references to other prophetic traditions with a similar message. Below are (summarised versions of) some of the most quoted prophetic traditions, across the three religious organisations I am focussing on, that are used to support the killing of blasphemers:

- There was a blind man, who killed his slave girl. He came to the Prophet and confessed that he had killed his son's mother. He said he killed her because she used to constantly say derogatory words about the Prophet Muhammad. He stopped her a couple of times, but she did not stop insulting the Prophet. Upon hearing this, the Prophet did not denounce his act. Rather, he praised it and said this murder was void (that is, there would be no repercussions for the killer).
- On the occasion of victory over Mecca, the Prophet graciously announced public forgiveness for everyone in Mecca. However, he did not forgive the blasphemers. He issued a list of five or six people who used to say blasphemous things about the Prophet. The Prophet ordered that they should be killed even if they were found sticking to the walls of Kaaba—the house of Allah where it is normally forbidden to shed blood. One of the blasphemers identified by the Prophet was ibn-e-Khutl. He used to write derogatory poems about the Prophet and publicised them through women singers. He was killed as per the order of the Prophet.

- In another instance, there was a doubting and hypocritical Muslim man. He had a fight with a Jewish man. They took it to the Prophet Muhammad who decided in favour of the Jew because he was right. The Muslim man was suspicious and took the matter to Hazrat Umar (one of the companions of the Prophet who later became Caliph as well). He asked Umar to do justice because he felt that Muhammad had not been just in his decision. Umar asked him to confirm whether the decision was made by the Prophet Muhammad? He said, 'yes'. Umar went inside his house, came back with a sword, and beheaded the Muslim man. Umar said, 'This sword will decide the fate of whoever does not accept the judgement of Muhammad.' The Muslim man's family went to the Prophet to complain but the Prophet said that Umar did the right thing because the man insulted the Prophet by not accepting his decision.
- There was another man named Utab bin Ashraf who was very rich and used to write insulting verses about the Prophet. The Prophet one day asked all his companions, 'Who will save me from the evil of this man'. There was a companion called Muhammad bin Muslima who stepped forward and killed that man.

So, there are certain Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions that are used in almost all the religious publications, sermons, pamphlets, social media posts and so on. Not surprisingly, then, these are the same 'sources' that are quoted by almost every supporter of blasphemy-related violence that I talked to. I did not explicitly ask any of them to share their religious knowledge with me; they themselves felt the need to refer to some 'sources' to authenticate their beliefs and passion concerning blasphemy and its punishment. These people ranged from working class Muslim men to government employed middle class men, and from religious clerics to lawyers. The religious discourse is thus not limited to the religious scholars, it is widely distributed and is reflected in everyday conversations of ordinary Muslims. It includes even those rural sections of society who would normally be dismissed as illiterate masses. During my research, I came across many such people who had not received any formal education, could not read or write, but quoted Quranic verses and Prophet's traditions to me. They had learnt these 'sources' and their interpretations from their local Imams in Friday sermons and other preachers on television.

Moreover, the ordinary people at local level—even those belonging to lower socio-economic classes and rural backgrounds—have access to social media these days and are not only consuming but also participating in the dominant religious discourse online. The religious discourse provides them meaning and inculcates passion in them. Hence, many religious scholars as well as common people passionately argue that anyone who commits blasphemy must be killed and does not deserve forgiveness, according to the 'religious sources' and 'Islamic law'. Their motivations are thus embedded in cognition/reason and affect/passion

simultaneously. Since they all refer to the sources of Islamic law, it is pertinent to have a brief overview of the traditional sources of Islamic law and their positions on the issue of blasphemy and its punishment.

Blasphemy in Islamic Juristic Literature

While the Quran and Sunnah (prophetic traditions) are accepted by most major sects in Pakistan as the basis of Islamic law, they mostly rely upon interpretations of major scholars in established schools of thought and *ijma'a* (consensus amongst the scholars). There are four major schools of thought within Sunni Islam (Hanafi, Shaf'i, Maliki, and Hanbali) and one major school of thought within Shi'i Islam (Jaafari) that are practiced in Pakistan. The juristic discourse between different schools of thought is mostly theological and uses legal reasoning to derive conclusions. However, there are instances of impassioned debate between the Islamic jurists when it comes to the issue of protecting the honour of the Prophet and Islam. The most significant value of the juristic sources, nevertheless, lies in the authenticity and authority that they grant to the contemporary religious discourse.

The English word blasphemy—referring to the conceptual category of sacrilege—does not correspond to a distinct respective category in Islamic Jurisprudence. In Islamic literature, the words most commonly used for the concept of sacrilege include *sabb* (insult), *shatam* (abuse, vilification), *takdhib* or *tajdif* (denial), *iftira* (concoction), *la'n* or *la'ana* (curse) and *ta'n* (accuse, defame) (Wielderhold 1997, 40-45). Moreover, the concept of sacrilege often overlaps with *kufr* (unbelief), *fisq* (depravity), and *ridda* (apostasy) (S. Khan 2014, 65). Kamali (1997) argued that there is a tendency in traditional practice of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) to treat blasphemy, apostasy, and infidelity as 'substantially concurrent and interchangeable' (208). However, the concept of blasphemy is subsumed under apostasy with reference to Muslims only, as a non-Muslim cannot commit the Islamic offence of apostasy. Blasphemy can, on the other hand, be committed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike (ibid., 210). Accordingly, the punishment for blasphemy has traditionally been thought of in two separate categories: non-Muslims committing blasphemy and Muslims committing blasphemy.

In the case of non-Muslims, most of the Islamic juristic literature deals with those non-Muslims who live in the land of the Muslims, either through invasion, or through spread of Islam in a way that it took hold of political power domestically (Arzt 2002, 21). Thus, the

literature concerning punishment of non-Muslim blasphemers is relevant mostly in situations when the majority are Muslims, and/or the political power belongs to Muslims. In either case, the non-Muslims are given the status of *Dhimmi*: a minority bound to pay *jizya*—certain amount of money in the form of taxes—to the government in return for protection of their lives (Emon 2012, 37). Under this pledge of security, the Muslim government is responsible for the life and safety of the non-Muslims living in their lands (ibid.).

There are varying opinions on the punishment of a member of the *Dhimmi* non-Muslim community who commits blasphemy (insults the religion, the Prophet, or Muslim authority)²³. The Hanafi school of thought—the most widely practiced in Pakistan—maintains that the offence of disbelief or infidelity is the biggest crime for which non-Muslims cannot be punished if they pay *jizya* (minority tax); thus, they cannot be killed even if they insult Islam. The punishment of a non-Muslim blasphemer is then discretionary (*tazeer*) based on what the ruler of the time deems appropriate. It can be death if the blasphemer is also combatant, or can be arrest, caning, etc. All other schools of thought (Shaf'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Jaafari) believe that the *Dhimmi*s break the pact (social contract) by committing blasphemy hence they lose protection of their lives, accorded to them in return for their taxes, and must be killed. Shaf'i, Maliki, and Jaafari schools have some provisions for forgiveness if the non-Muslim blasphemer converts to Islam and becomes a devout Muslim.

The punishment prescribed for Muslims committing blasphemy is often harsher. They are treated as apostates because by insulting the Prophet or the religion of Islam, they also demonstrate their unfaithfulness, disbelief, and denial of the religion of Islam (O'Sullivan 2001, 82). In fact, in most cases they are also punished for treason under the pretence of blasphemy. The punishment for apostasy/blasphemy/treason by Muslims is disputed amongst various scholars and schools of thought. The juristic literature written by Muslim scholars portrays apostasy as an unforgivable sin that must be punished by death unless the person in question repents and returns to the religion of Islam (A. Saeed 2011, 32). In some cases, even repentance is not an option, and anyone suspected of apostasy is considered liable to death. As put by Friedmann (2003), 'killing the unrepentant apostate is mandatory, while an

²³ The opinions presented here are summarised from the online archive of the Islamic juristic texts compiled by Engage Pakistan. Link: <http://engagepakistan.com/engage/digital-library-of-classical-fiqh-texts/>

“original” unbeliever is killed only if he is a combatant’ (123-124). Thus, a brief survey of the legal opinions of the jurists from different schools of thought, on the matter of prescribed punishment for an apostate, indicates that an adult Muslim male must be put to death unless he is not in full possession of his faculties—agreed on by all major schools of thought.

Shaf’i, Maliki, and Hanbali jurists agree that an apostate should be given a chance to repent. Hanafi School of law considers giving the option of repentance as a desirable but not mandatory course of action. Jaafari jurists concur that an apostate should be given a chance to repent, but they limit the availability of this option only to *murtadd milli* (a converted Muslim who reverts from Islam). The exact duration allowed for the incumbent to repent is debated amongst the different schools, and sometimes within one school of thought as well. However, the most common view is that an apostate should be allowed three days to repent. The ruling is somewhat different regarding female apostates in some of the schools of law mentioned above. According to Hanafi and Jaafari jurists, female apostates should not be killed; rather they are to be imprisoned, or tortured by their masters if they are slaves, until they accept Islam again. According to Hanbali, Maliki and Shaf’i schools of thought, women are also put to death (Jordan 2003, 62).

As we have seen, while there is a debate as to whether an apostate should be imprisoned first or executed without delay, the duration of repentance allowed to an apostate, and the punishment of an apostate depending upon the gender, there is a wide consensus among the Muslim Jurists on the death penalty for an apostate. Most of these jurists based their verdicts on the Islamic sources of the Quran and Sunnah (the Prophetic Tradition)—the two basic sources of Islamic law. While some of the scholars mentioned above have referred to the Quranic verses in their writings to support their arguments/judgments, many of them rely mainly on the Hadith literature to prove the imposition of death penalty on apostates.

What we learn from the discussion of the traditional Islamic juristic literature is that the punishment of blasphemers and apostates has always been a matter of debate amongst Islamic scholars and jurists. In the traditional Islamic juristic literature, as well as in view of the major Islamic scholars of the sub-continent (including the founders of major sub-sects such as Barelwis, Deobandis, etc.) in the pre-partition era, there have always been certain qualifications of the argument concerning punishment of blasphemers (Mazhar 2015). Comparing it with the present-day positions adopted by the scholars, we see that the nuances

of debate concerning frequency and intent of the offence, the possibility to repent, and different punishments prescribed for Muslims, non-Muslims, slaves, free people, men and women, have largely been lost in the current discourse.

Religious Authority and Construction of the Dominant Religious Discourse

In this section, I will discuss how the dominant religious discourse concerning blasphemy is shaped within the struggles over religious authority and legitimacy amongst different religious groups. I will first discuss the nature of religious authority in contemporary Pakistan, and then describe the power struggle between different groups for this authority.

The Ambivalence of Modernity: Absolutist Claims and Diffused Authority

The present consensus amongst the religious scholars on killing the blasphemers, as demonstrated by the dominant religious discourse, reflects a shift towards absolutist claims regarding the punishment of blasphemy and all other offences it subsumes. I argue that the current absolutist claims regarding the punishment of alleged blasphemers are an outcome of the dual nature of modernity—its desire for order and neat categorisation on the one hand, and the anxiety caused by growing multiplicity of opinions on the other. The modern condition is characterised by simultaneous homogenisation and heterogenisation, as described by Appadurai (1990, 295). Following Appadurai's theory, I argue that there are two distinct characteristics that define the prevalent religious discourse concerning blasphemy in contemporary Pakistan:

1. The homogenisation of the concept of the offence of blasphemy and the understanding of its punishment in absolutist terms.
2. The heterogenisation of religious authority marking a shift from traditional structures to unregulated multiplication of opinions and scholars.

First, we see that the various qualifications of the argument concerning the punishment of a blasphemer are removed, leading to absolutist understanding of offence and punishment. Representatives of most major sects and sub-sects in present-day Pakistan seem to have a homogenous conception of the punishment for a blasphemer. The death punishment for anyone who commits blasphemy—against the Prophet Muhammad—is arguably a unique point of consensus between all the sects. Moreover, as noted earlier, various categories and

concepts of offences are now subsumed under the popular imposed/appropriated Western term ‘blasphemy’ or the Urdu term *Tauheen-e-Risaalat* (insult to the Prophet). Various offences, including that of apostasy, are labelled under these terms in the popular religious discourse. Even though there is no punishment for apostasy in the Penal Code of Pakistan, the offence of apostasy—particularly with reference to Ahmadis—is understood as blasphemous, and more particularly as an insult to the Prophet. Thus, we see the modernity’s emphasis on neat categorisations and the desire for order and homogenisation reflected in the contemporary absolutist religious discourse.

Second, as opposed to the traditional religious authority, the religious authority in contemporary Pakistan is a lot more fluid and dispersed. While Islam never had a consolidated central orthodoxy like Christianity, there were established schools of thought that were accepted as legal and juristic authority after the initial formative period. In his work on continuity and change in the Islamic legal authority, Wael Hallaq highlighted that multiplicity of doctrinal narratives was a norm even during the era of consolidation of major schools of thought in Islam (2004, 123). He argued that discursive and hermeneutic practices were always a part of the Islamic juristic traditions (*ibid.*, 127). However, the discursive change in traditional schools of thought, as Hallaq argued, always took place within the established structures of authority (2004, 166). The new and emerging scholars were first trained in established schools of thought, and their interpretations were then produced and defended, rejected or recognised within the existing structures. The structure of religious authority and the relevant discursive practices are quite different in the present-day Pakistan. The new scholars do not have to be trained in any formal system of religious education. The authority is mostly self-proclaimed, and legitimacy is drawn rather from charisma and popularity.

Robinson (2008) argued that the modernist reformist movements amongst the South Asian Muslims qualitatively changed the nature of religious authority (265-268). As noted in the previous chapter, some of the reformist groups completely broke away from the established schools of jurisprudence while others, such as Deobandis and Barelwis, continued to follow the established schools of thought within Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, all the reformist groups, including the Deobandis and Barelwis, questioned the authority of the past and established newer ways of relating to the traditional schools of thought through a renewed focus on *ijtihad*—independent reasoning (*ibid.*, 262). According to Robinson, ‘the breaking of the

continuous link with the past has enabled new forms of religious authority to emerge, an authority that could be made and remade in each generation and make use of the new resources of the times—a very modern kind of authority’ (2008, 268). The newer modes of religious authority, therefore, did not require formal affiliation with an established institution of learning and could be claimed by anyone who could read the religious texts that became widely available in the local languages due to the print revolution in the nineteenth century.

The dispersal of religious authority was further enabled in Pakistan by government interventions in the institutes of religious learning. As Vali Nasr (2000b) noted in his study of religious scholars and the rise of sectarian violence in Pakistan, the *Ulema* (religious scholars) are not trained any more in traditional intellectual tools and forms of knowledge associated with Islamic theological and juristic education (146-147). On the contrary, since the government’s sponsorship of *madrassahs* during the Soviet war, the emphasis of religious education has been highly political. He writes,

So notable was the impact of the government initiative that Islamist and self-styled Islamic groups—whose members were predominantly lay and had received modern education—began to establish *madrassahs* of their own (147).

There is not only a proliferation of self-proclaimed religious scholars with no formal religious education, but also a striking overlap of political parties and centres of religious learning. As already pointed out, most of the religious scholars dominating the discourse concerning blasphemy are politicians as well. The number of politicians cum religious scholars has been expanding exponentially due to lack of formal requirements, such as recognition by traditional authority. There is a shift towards more organic, charismatic forms of religious authority. Anyone who can speak on the matters of religion with a certain conviction and passion has the possibility of establishing himself as a legitimate scholar. Legitimacy is derived from popularity rather than from training and qualification. This shift is in line with the modern reformist tendencies as well, as discussed in the previous chapter. Given modernity’s emphasis on individual responsibility and capability as opposed to traditional authority, every Muslim has opinions and interpretations of his own, and can possibly achieve popularity through his own views and interpretations.

Hence, we see, the dual forces of modernity, that is, simultaneous homogenisation and heterogenisation at play in determining the popular religious discourse and construction of

religious authority in Pakistan. The inherently contradictory nature of modernity has been pointed out by several theorists. For example, Bauman, a prominent theorist of modernity, argued that ambivalence and duality are inherent characteristics of modernity (2000, 106). On the one hand, the emphasis on categorisation, rationalisation and predictability was supposed to achieve order, homogeneity and domestication of chaos. On the other hand, the drive for homogeneity breeds uncertainty, differences and anxiety concerning those differences (ibid.). The heterogenisation of religious opinions, and the constant flow of information exposes common people—as well as the religious scholars—to different and conflicting views, leading to a prevalence of uncertainty. The lack of one established truth when the modern nation-state emphasises the need for a meta-narrative leaves people anxious and desiring certainty. The desire for certainty is then expressed in terms of absolutist claims describing everything in terms of black and white, pure and impure, to reassert the boundaries. The absolutist claims, however, concern the punishment of blasphemy and do not define what it is to blaspheme in any certain terms. The lack of certainty as to what can be deemed blasphemous is in fact an added source of uncertainty. In this context of prevailing uncertainty, the competition of various groups and individuals over religious authority is what describes the current religious discourse concerning blasphemy in present-day Pakistan. It is the competition for authority and legitimacy that constructs the *affective meaning* that the religious discourse holds for the people. I will now discuss the politics of the three religious parties—JI, PAT, and TLP—to demonstrate how they compete against each other to achieve legitimacy and authority in the face of the uncertainty arising from the multiplication of claims to religious authority.

Competing for Authority: Politics of Uncertainty and Legitimacy

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) was conceived in 1941 by Abul-Ala-Maududi, a reformist Sunni Muslim scholar as a modern, pan-Islamist, anti-colonial movement in the Indian sub-continent. Initially against the idea of Pakistan, JI has been a significant political party since the creation of Pakistan. While they have never won a significant number of seats in elections, they have liaised with ruling and opposition parties periodically to influence political decision making, particularly in favour of Islamist policies. JI have always emphasised their text-based, urban reformist Islam. Their headquarters in Mansoorah, Lahore have extensive libraries with a plethora of publications on the issue of blasphemy.

The other two organisations (PAT and TLP) represent Sunni Barelwis—followers of reformist-Sufi movement headed by Ahmed Raza Khan Barelwi in early 20th century. Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) was formed in 1989 by Tahir-ul-Qadri, a Pakistani Canadian Barelwi scholar. Qadri had been running an institute of religious learning Minhaj-ul-Quran from 1980 and was also intensely involved in textual religious discourse. This organisation is registered as a university, and has libraries, bookshops, and publication houses associated with it. The founder, Tahir-ul-Qadri, has written hundreds of books on religious interpretations. Many of these books concern the issue of blasphemy exclusively. He is also famous for his sermons aired through Minhaj-ul-Quran's own TV channel, as well as other media. While Qadri spends most of his time in Canada, he occasionally visits Pakistan and has arranged events like *Namoos-e-Risaalat Convention* (Honour of the Prophet Convention) in the past.

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) is the most recently formed political organisation, registered in 2015. TLP emerged out of the religious organisation, Labbaik ya Rasool Allah, formed by supporters of Mumtaz Qadri, exclusively with the aim of protecting the honour of the Prophet. This organisation is headed by Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi, a disabled man in a wheelchair who travels across the country to address his followers. Rizvi connects with his supporters through the Punjabi vernacular popular amongst the working classes. TLP's discourse is largely disseminated through religious sermons in mosques and streets, their recordings and live screenings posted on social media, pamphlets, street protests, banners, etc.

Together, these three organisations are actively involved in producing the dominant discourse concerning the punishment of blasphemy in Pakistan. Despite the proliferation of religious scholars claiming religious authority and political power, their political claims greatly overlap. All three of the political parties under discussion have mandates concerning widespread social and political reforms based on Islamic ideology. JI's constitution (Article 4) defines their mission as 'the establishment of the *Deen* (Divine Order or the Islamic way of life) and in essence the achievement of Allah's pleasure and success in the Hereafter.' They further explain the scope of the establishment of 'Divine Order' in these words:

Establishment of *Deen* does not mean establishing some part of it, rather establishing it in its entirety, in individual and collective life, and whether it pertains to prayers or fasting, Haj or Zakat, socio-economic or political issues of life. No part of Islam is irrelevant, but the whole Islam is necessary.

In the recent past, JI has been very active in the anti-corruption campaign against the government, using the slogan ‘corruption-free Pakistan’. In March 2016, they took out a ‘train march’ against corruption across the country—from Peshawar to Karachi (*The News International* 2016). They have also raised their voice against terrorism, and the government’s weak efforts to curb terrorism. In a recent ‘Resolution on the economic conditions in the country’, they declared that ‘contrary to the government claims, the economy of the country was on the decline’. After quoting figures of rising debts, and worsening conditions of the agricultural farmers, their statement included the following criticism of anti-terrorism actions of the government:

The *Shoora* (committee) felt that the implementation on the NAP (National Action Plan) against terrorism in the wake of the Peshawar Army Public School was negligible and the government had failed to make any progress on most of the points of the NAP including the arrests of the culprits involved in the Peshawar tragedy. On the other hand, it said, the government had spent most of its time in an uncalled-for campaign against the mosques and madrassahs, which was aimed at harassing the religious circles instead of wiping out terrorism.

They further reported that,

The JI Shoora renewed its commitment to stand by the masses especially against the problems of poverty, price hike, load shedding, lawlessness, and terrorism. It said that the JI would organize the oppressed and downtrodden masses in line with its people’s agenda for the enforcement of the Islamic system with the ultimate aim to establish a truly Islamic welfare state.

Similarly, PAT has been rallying to ‘revolutionise’ the current system to create a truly Islamic welfare state based on ‘participatory democracy’. The current manifesto of PAT, called ‘Green Revolution’, developed in 2014 after mass protests against the government’s corruption and electoral rigging, promises to bring free housing to homeless, unemployment allowances to the unemployed, and free education and health facilities for the population. It specifically takes aim at elimination of corruption to achieve its goals. The newly formed TLP has similar objectives listed on its website. The TLP’s mandate focusses on nine points: accountability, implementation of laws, justice, free health, free education, security for all, freedom of Kashmir, utilising media’s role, strong economy, and friendly foreign relations. The TLP calls itself an ‘Islamist political party’ with an overall objective ‘to make Pakistan an Islamic state, governed by Shariat-e-Mohammadi (Muhammad’s Sharia), through a

gradual legal, and political process’. Both PAT and TLP have also been known to condemn terrorism.

A review of their manifestos shows that a stand against corruption and distancing their Islamist agendas from terrorism are common features of these political parties. Another common agenda for these parties, as will be demonstrated in the discussion below, is to ensure that the ‘blasphemers’ are punished. While TLP is formed with an explicit aim of defending the honour of the Prophet, the other two also support the killing of the blasphemers and have been active in anti-blasphemy campaigns. However, while they agree on certain agendas, they are also competing with each other for power and influence within the shared political sphere. How, then, do they establish their legitimacy and gain supporters when they are all rallying for the same causes? How does the rivalry play out with the shared goals and agendas?

It comes down to who can establish themselves as the rightful guardians of these causes. In order to do that, they need to make more sharp and aggressive claims than the others. Their politics involve asserting authority and legitimacy by taking *ownership* of a cause and making absolutist, aggressive claims to outdo each other. They fight over the *ownership* of a cause by claiming that they are the ones who care the most about it and *represent* it at the *national* stage. For example, a senior member of JI talked to me at length about how they were trying to bring all religious groups and parties together for the cause of protecting the honour of the Prophet. They organised a *national* conference on the issue of blasphemy in May 2016 after Mumtaz Qadri’s execution and invited all other groups and parties to join them. The JI member complained,

Everyone saw that masses came to Qadri’s funeral and made it obvious that they love the Prophet Muhammad, and Mumtaz Qadri due to his association with the Prophet. These masses and their leaders include people belonging to all schools of thought. We in Jamaat-e-Islami have been trying to bring all religious groups and sects on the same forum on this issue. We believe in solidarity and we should all work together on this. We held a convention earlier this year where we invited all sects and groups and formed a joint action committee. However, some Barelwi groups do not want to come together with us because they want to use this issue for their own political gains. They do not come to the joint forums. Even though Mumtaz Qadri’s father did not make them the custodian of the campaign, they have been pretending it is only their issue. Some other Barelwi groups come. But Allama Sarwat Qadri, Khadim Hussain Rizvi etc. are not willing to come with us.

PAT and TLP have also been organising similar national conventions where they represent *themselves* as the ones most concerned with, and the legitimate guardians of, the honour of the Prophet. JI and PAT both have significant women's wings and in past the women members have also organised conferences on the Honour of the Prophet. TLP does not have an active women's wing so far, but they have carried out rallies and conventions across the country, and protests including major sit-ins at the capital in March 2016 and November 2017. So, different religious political parties strive to outdo each other by competing for the ownership of issues such as blasphemy, which has gained tremendous symbolic power in the Pakistani political sphere.

Some of the older religious political parties, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, relied on the strategy of using charity to amass support. They have an established charitable organisation called Al-Khidmat Foundation that provides health, education, disaster relief, and other community services to the people for free. Similarly, Minhaj Welfare Foundation is the charity wing of Minhaj-ul-Quran organisation. PAT and TLP leaders are also engaged in more charismatic public sermons to attract public support. Tahir-ul-Qadri has gained the support of an urban, educated population due to his textual approach, as he delivers his sermons with stacks of books in front of him, reading out references from those books in Arabic, translating, and sharing the references to the 'sources' with the public on the spot. His approach is based on discursive reasoning and rationality. Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi of TLP, on the other hand, is known for his passionate speech in Punjabi vernacular, appealing to rural, less educated, and lower socio-economic sections of the society. The fact that he is a disabled man who travels across the country in a wheelchair, giving lectures on the love of the Prophet, often reciting verses in Arabic, adds to his credibility and legitimacy. Moreover, he dissociates himself from worldly benefits to prove his altruism to the cause. For example, in one of his sermons, he says,

A police officer came to me and asked if I wanted money, political position, visa for abroad, etc. I told him that I am not concerned with any of these things they use to lure me. I am here only for the love of the Prophet.

He further said at another point in his sermon:

My only purpose is to bring the system of *Nizaam-e-Mustafa* (Muhammad's system) into practice. Once this mission has been accomplished, I will be happy to serve as a sweeper

at the graves of the lovers of the Prophet—who have died defending the honour of the Prophet.

It must be noted that the term ‘Nizaam-e-Mustafa’ in the Pakistani political sphere is at least as old as Pakistan itself. Different political parties, including JI and PAT, have used it at various points to make their political claims. It has, however, more recently been associated with defending the honour of the Prophet. Since 2011, many religious parties have raised the call for *Nizaam-e-Mustafa* to counter the offence of blasphemy in Pakistan. Despite the widespread use of the term, all religious political parties claim that they are the true custodians of *Nizaam-e-Mustafa* and that they are the only ones who can bring this system to Pakistan. Once again, we see the battle for the public imagination of nation and state underlying this debate. Khadim Hussain Rizvi of TLP proclaimed while addressing a crowd of his followers in Karachi in January 2017:

There is only one way of achieving a prosperous state of Pakistan, and that is by defending the honour of the Prophet. Those who speak against me are in fact speaking against the honour of the Prophet. Now is the time that every Sunni should vote for us, to bring the religion of the Prophet, *Nizaam-e-Mustafa*, to the throne. It is the responsibility of every single Sunni in this country.

In this statement again, we see the absolutist claims to evoke support from the masses by claiming that they are either with TLP or against the honour of the Prophet. These claims are further legitimised by the spiritual experiences attributed to Khadim Hussain Rizvi, by himself and his followers. For example, when he was arrested in early January 2017, for celebrating the murder of Salman Taseer in Lahore, there were stories going around on Facebook about his spiritual powers (Tanveer 2017). His followers claimed that ‘as Maulana Khadim Hussain Rizvi entered the prison cell, which was a really abject part of prison full of cockroaches, he gestured to the cockroaches and told them to stay away from him as he was there for the love of the Prophet. And no cockroach dared to come close to him’. Through such stories, spiritual authenticity is attributed to the religio-political leaders.

In addition to miracle based charismatic authority, Rizvi has also established himself as one who takes ‘tough stand against the forces of evil’. He is known for being particularly aggressive and using swear words against his enemies—the West, the liberals, the seculars, the government, the police, or whoever does not support his cause. His style of gaining legitimacy by asserting his authority in absolutist and violent terms sets him apart from JI and PAT, whose tone is softer. Interestingly, while TLP has emerged relatively recently as

compared to JI and PAT, they became the fifth-most popular political party in the 2018 general elections. Thus, his absolutist and more aggressive stance, his use of strong colloquial language, his disability, and his humble pretensions are some of the major factors that contribute to popularity and legitimacy of Khadim Hussain Rizvi.

This is not to say that a particular party or religious scholar has won the competition to establish themselves as the most legitimate defender of the honour of the Prophet. The struggle is alive and will predictably remain so. New religious scholars and parties may emerge, the older ones may revive themselves with better strategies and techniques, but it is the process of the contestation itself that has led to the sharpening of the dominant religious discourse concerning blasphemy and articulation of punishment in absolutist terms over time.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that the religious discourse concerning the punishment of blasphemy in Pakistan has become increasingly homogenous despite the rising heterogeneity of its promoters. Amidst the uncertainty created by the multiplicity of claimants of religious authority, the religious political parties have turned to competitive absolutist claims within this discourse to consolidate their own power and legitimacy. The homogeneity and absolutism of the discourse lends it a symbolic power within the religio-political sphere which becomes the focal point of competing claims to legitimacy by various players within this sphere. The symbolic power of the issue of blasphemy rests on its *affective meaning* that appeals to people's imaginations and rouses their passions. The recent political events in Pakistan manifest the symbolic power of the absolutist discourse concerning blasphemy and its centrality to politics in contemporary Pakistan.

In November 2017, two Sunni Barelwi political parties—TLP and Sunni Tehreek—took to the streets to protest the alleged blasphemy committed by the law minister Zahid Hamid by changing the wording of the declaration of faith in the parliamentary oath (Hasan 2017)²⁴. The government retracted the alleged change after the outcry from the religious groups and explained it as a clerical error. However, the religious parties were not satisfied and demanded

²⁴ The declaration was changed from 'I solemnly believe in the finality of the Prophet Muhammad' to 'I believe in the finality of the Prophet Muhammad'.

resignation of the law minister and an inquiry into who was responsible for the attempted change. Thus, the above-mentioned Barelwi parties took out a rally, culminating in a sit-in at Faizabad interchange in the capital city of Islamabad. The sit-in by the religious leaders of these parties and thousands of their supporters continued for almost three weeks, suspending normal life of the residents and holding the city hostage²⁵. In the last week of November, the government decided to disperse the protestors, which led to clashes between the police and the protesters. Several people including police personnel died, and hundreds were injured (ibid.).

As a result, protests by infuriated religious groups spread across the country. The government had to eventually call in the army, who refused to help the government by using force against the protestors. However, the army arbitrated a peace agreement between the protestors and the government²⁶. As per the agreement, the law minister had to resign, and government had to accept a number of demands of the protestors including release of the arrested protestors without any charges against them. The law minister not only resigned but also had to issue a public statement reaffirming his faith and his firm belief in the finality of the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, the government, the military, and the protestors were all using the same language of their faith and love for the Prophet Muhammad to legitimise their respective positions (Wasim and Azeem 2017).

There was a small number of analysts and intellectuals who saw these events as a compromise on democracy and surrender of power to agitating religious groups. While this is not something new in the history of Pakistan, as those in power have always tried to appease the religious groups to amass support, and to legitimise themselves, the enormous political currency gained by the issue of blasphemy and the massive number of people who came out in support of the issue was astonishing for many. Through a discussion of the dominant religious discourse and power struggles that enable this discourse, I have demonstrated in this chapter how the issue of blasphemy has gained such political currency—symbolic power—to mobilise masses and to pit major players in the Pakistani politics against each other. The

²⁵ Due to road blockage, a child died in an ambulance for not being able to reach hospital on time. Residents of the city had extreme problems commuting to schools, offices, etc.

²⁶ The army's role as an 'arbiter' was later challenged by the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

discussion has also highlighted the multiple ways (such as sermons, publications, welfare and charity work) through which the religio-political leaders reach out to the masses. The dominant religious discourse thus engages the ordinary people who are the primary agents involved in blasphemy accusations at the micro-level. The widespread uncertainty due to multiplication of religious authority and the sharpening discourse of the religious leaders inculcates further moral anxieties amongst the ordinary people. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the dominant discourse concerning the punishment of blasphemy shapes the inter-personal relationships within which blasphemy accusations arise.

Chapter 5 - Blasphemy Accusations: Purity, Moral anxiety, and The Enemy Within

As the title of this thesis suggests, the word ‘Pakistan’ literally means ‘land of the pure’. It is the combination of *pāk* (meaning ‘pure’ in Persian and Pashto) and *stān* (meaning ‘the place of’ in Persian). It embodies the notion that Muslims are purer than other communities of South Asia from whom they separated themselves through Partition. The concern for purity—enshrined in the religio-national narrative—occupies a central place in the everyday lives of Pakistani Muslims. The present chapter demonstrates how blasphemy accusations have become cardinal to the concern for maintaining purity within the individual and communal consciousness. Taking the premise that blasphemy accusations are made within the context of inter-personal power relations, I focus on local-level manipulations, negotiations, and constructions of the meanings of purity/impurity and transgressions associated with these concepts. I argue that the accusations are driven by the accusers’ sense of moral anxiety—concerning socio-cultural and religious values—which is grounded in their sense of personal guilt as well as a fear of sin taking over the society. The moral anxiety, as I have shown in the previous chapters, is a consequence of modernity’s emphasis on individual responsibility and reformism, the state’s attempts to suppress differences, the prevailing religious discourse with its absolutist positions, proliferation of the figures of religious authority, and the uncertainties inherent in all these processes. The present chapter will demonstrate how the moral anxiety manifests itself in the everyday lives of individuals and how blasphemy accusations become a mechanism to deal with it.

Focussing on the everyday lives of people, I aim to answer three inter-related questions in this chapter: 1) What are the motivations of the accusers? 2) What are the transgressions that trigger the blasphemy accusations and 3) Who is accused? I argue that the blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are a mechanism of purification—a technique of the self for the accusers—triggered by perceived transgressions of conceptual categories. I further contend that through blasphemy accusations, the accusers live and act out their inner dilemmas, moral torments, fears and uncertainties, projecting individual as well as communal sense of sin and guilt onto expendable familiar others. Thus, having discussed the institutionalisation of the ideals of piety and exclusivity by the state of Pakistan and the popularisation of absolutist religious discourse in the previous chapters, I turn my focus to ‘the ways in which the

conceptual boundaries of the state are extended and remade' in the everyday lives of its citizens (Das and Poole 2004, 20). However, as Das and Poole (2004, 22) warned, the everyday lives or the 'local worlds' do not stand in binary opposition to the state; rather they are enmeshed with the latter. Thus, I focus on the everyday lives of individuals keeping in mind what Foucault called 'political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures' (Foucault 1982, 785). It means that the exclusivist tendencies driving the need for purification are simultaneously ingrained in individual lives and state structures; it is not simply a top-down application of power. Instead, ordinary people also have the power to shape what would then become the focal point of mobilisation to agents vying for the power.

The Accuser: Uncertainty, Moral Anxiety, and the Urge to Reform

The constant striving for personal piety is a defining characteristic of everyday life of Pakistani Muslims (N. Khan 2012, 11). As the previous chapters have shown, the struggle for personal piety is grounded within the context of modern reformism, the exclusivist national narrative, and the dominant religious discourse. I have argued that the prevalent uncertainty, the misalliance of the normative and ideological with the everyday existence, and the increased emphasis on the individual responsibility have led to widespread moral anxiety²⁷. Most of the Muslims I talked to during my research expressed, in one way or another, their dissatisfaction with themselves as Muslims. The phrase, 'I am but a *gunahgar* (sinful) Muslim' is commonly spoken by Muslims in Pakistan. While the speakers consider themselves incomplete and inadequate Muslims, they are constantly striving to improve, and to reform themselves. The constant aspiration to be better Muslims—the tendency towards 'self-reform'—has already been documented in Pakistan (ibid., 57). I will demonstrate the prevalence of moral anxiety and the desire to reform in the lives of Pakistani Muslims through two specific examples.

The first example is of Jamal—a middle-aged Sunni man I met in the Jamaat-e-Islami library at Mansoor, Lahore. Jamal struck up a conversation with me as he saw me collecting books

²⁷ Joel Robbins' (2004) book, 'Becoming sinners', presents a similar account of 'moral torment' amongst the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea in face of tension between local tradition and change brought about by the ideals of Christianity.

on *Tauheen-e-Risaalat*. He told me that he was very happy to see ‘a young woman’ interested in the topic. He said that he was really worried about the youth of Pakistan who are ‘exposed to social media these days with blasphemous content all over it’. He gave me a few examples of the ‘outrageous content’ he had seen online, which included posts deriding the Prophet Muhammad for marrying a young girl, and remarks about Quran being a fabricated book. He looked visibly perturbed as he went on to say that he had seen many other things which he could not ‘even repeat and imagine’. He lamented that the evil and sin had penetrated the society and was a threat to young Muslims’ minds. He then told me that he has three young daughters—two of them in high school. He said,

I am myself a sinful person; I miss my prayers and I sometimes get tempted by the worldly distractions. But I have the fear of Allah in my heart, and I want to transfer that to my kids as well. My daughters are decent girls, they do not go out with their friends or engage in useless activities. I have taught them Islam, but I worry that they may be influenced by the evil around them. Girls in schools and colleges wear revealing clothes these days, they sing and dance, and do all sorts of immoral things. I want to keep my daughters away from those influences, but I cannot do so unless I am myself knowledgeable and practising religion properly. That is why I started visiting this library to learn more about our religion, so that I can make myself and my kids better Muslims. It is necessary in this time and age when sin is all around us: on social media, on TV, in books and magazines.

Jamal told me how he had started praying more regularly, using more references from Quran and Hadith in his everyday interactions with his family, and cutting out negative influences—such as Indian and English TV channels—from his and his family’s lives. He condemned the Western influence, the ‘evil of women’s mafia corrupting the society in the name of women’s rights’, and the ‘shameless politicians and religious scholars who were selling religion’ to serve the agenda of the powers who wanted to undo Pakistan. He was clearly worried about the national identity as well as people’s religious identity and like most other Pakistanis saw both as inherently related. He also had an internalised idea of a uniform nation/religious community. While condemning the religious scholars ‘who sell religion’, he said that he believed there should not be any sects within Islam; ‘we are all simply Muslims’. When I asked him what he meant by a Muslim, he had a very specific idea of Muslim-ness and disapproved of anyone who did not fall under that description. A Muslim, for him, was someone who believed in Allah and his Prophet Muhammad and practised their teachings. He qualified his description of a Muslim by adding that those who pray to saints and go to shrines ‘have formed their own false gods that have nothing to do with Islam’.

Such criticism of the shrine-going Muslims—usually Barelwis and Shias—is not new and has been popular amongst certain reformist groups for centuries. In particular, these arguments are associated with Deobandis and Wahhabis who criticise the Barelwis for their deviant cultural practices. However, Jamal was neither Deobandi nor Wahhabi. He described himself as a lover of the Prophet and a believer in the *noor* (spiritual light) of the Prophet—an assertion that Deobandis and Wahhabis would disagree with. Thus, he did not fall into any fixed sectarian categories or reformist ideologies but contrived his own categories and ideas of reform. As Naveeda Khan (2012) showed in her rich ethnography of religious arguments and disputations in everyday life in Pakistan, the ‘potential lines of movement among entrenched differences’ are a normal part of public religiosity in Pakistan (6). Hence, there are as many ‘possible positions’ as can be ‘generated by selves encountering others in the world’ (ibid.). Even though the sense of living in a morally and religiously corrupt society and the desire to reform it to some form of ideal Islamic society is common to majority of Muslims in Pakistan, there are no uniform reformist directions (Osella and Osella 2008). Thus, I see reformism as a mindset rather than a defined movement. Living with this mindset, each person has her/his own ideas of what needs to be reformed, and how. In fact, the whole struggle over whose reform is the right direction of reform marks the essence of modern religiosity in Pakistan.

The second example, of Mahmood, will further demonstrate this tendency. I met Mahmood, who works as a clerk in a government office, at a religious centre. He is a Sunni Barelwi man from a poor neighbourhood of Lahore. He is a devout follower of Imam Ahmed Raza Khan Barelwi—the founder of the Barelwi sect of Sunni Islam in the Indian sub-continent. In line with the Barelwi sect’s inclination towards Sufi Islam in South Asia, Mahmood regards various Sufi saints as his spiritual masters. He, along with his family, visits Sufi shrines regularly and participates in devotional rituals. He has also pledged his *Bayt* (allegiance) to one particular Sufi master—the Peer of Golra Shareef in Islamabad. This is a common practice amongst devout Barelwis to have a particular Sufi master as the more formal relation of spiritual bond—while they regard all other Sufi Saints as informal sources of spiritual authority. Mahmood was also a member of Minhaj-ul-Quran International—a reformist-Sunni Barelwi religious learning institute authorised to award degrees in religious education, and more recently affiliated with the political party (PAT) headed by its Pakistani-Canadian founding chairman, Tahir-ul-Qadri. He regretted the fact that he could not continue his

membership due to his excessive workload but asserted that he still attended some events at Minhaj-ul-Quran and held Tahir-ul-Qadri in a very high regard.

Mahmood has his own ideas about reforming or purifying the society. He believes that prostrating before the graves of Saints—an accepted practice among most Sufi and Barelwi groups—is a serious sin. He also believes that the Sufi saints are intermediaries to access the Prophet Muhammad and Allah and should be revered. He himself engages in physical acts of reverence, such as touching the graves of his saints to receive their blessing, but he asserts that prostrating before the graves is not allowed and such practices should be eliminated. Thus, Mahmood's reformist views also transcend the fixed sectarian categories as he questions the practices and beliefs of both his own sect and those outside it at the same time. The reformist mindset, however, is not limited to the different religious practices of different sects; it is also present in the more mundane matters of everyday life. Mahmood constantly reflects on common social practices and beliefs and evaluates them against the religious ideals he holds.

For example, he believes that it is not a woman's duty to serve her in-laws 'as per Islam' even though it is a common practice—and expectation of women—in Pakistan. He argues that it is 'a distortion of Islamic teachings based on corrupt cultural norms and has nothing to do with Islam'. Similarly, he believes that there is no concept of dowry in Islam, but 'present-day Pakistani Muslims practice it following the Hindus'—a corruption of Islamic tradition in his view. It must be kept in mind that Barelwis are themselves criticised for following the cultural practices of Hindus in revering the saints and shrines. He further argues that it is unfair to divorce a woman for not being able to bear children which is also a common practice. It is 'a denial of God's blessings', according to him. He also believes that women have a right to choose whom to marry. He mentioned the example of Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet, who chose the Prophet as her husband, to justify his point. Many of these beliefs would be contradicted by mainstream Sunni religious clerics, and even other lay Sunni Muslims in Pakistan. Nevertheless, he sees something impure in the existing condition of the society and strives to get rid of it to reinforce religious piety as much as he can.

Mahmood believes that one should never hurt any other person or cause them grief. He takes a very high moral tone when he asserts that looking after others and serving other human beings should be preferred over one's selfish desires in this world. 'One should look out for

neighbours, parents, wife, children’, he asserts. He suggests that society is going through a moral decline and it is more important than ever to spread good by being kind to others and to eliminate evil by eliminating those who insult the religion.

Thus, in the same sentence, and with the same conviction, he argued for treating others kindly and killing a blasphemer without any mercy. He believed that if one even asks for evidence of the Prophethood of Muhammad, she/he is outside the pale of Islam and should be killed. He passionately believed that whoever demonstrates even slightly suspicious views towards Islam, or the Prophet Muhammad, must be punished publicly without requiring any recourse to state law. He proclaimed:

The Prophet is an ideal example of how to conduct human relationships. I, being his follower, must imitate his ways of life. I learn from him that we should fulfil our duties to other human beings at any cost. In fact, the rights of people are more important to fulfil than the rights of Allah. However, these human rights do not apply to one who insults our beloved Prophet. A blasphemer is a mere filth in the society that must be removed as quickly as possible.

It became apparent in my conversations with him that he would consider his own faith tainted if he did not act against a blasphemer. At the core of his concern for the community, as well as his hatred against the blasphemer, was his focus on his own piety and authenticity. Both serving the community through acts of kindness and killing the blasphemer are processes of self-making that serve the same purpose for him at the end: enhancing his personal piety. Thus, I argue that it is the constant ‘becoming’ of the self, as Naveeda Khan (2012) called it, that drives the need to purify society of its sins.

Both Jamal and Mahmood, while disagreeing on some crucial aspects of religious practice and the criteria for being a proper Muslim, are striving for purer, reformed selves. Both of them are quite unsure about their own purity—calling themselves sinful Muslims—and have an abstract understanding of the evil that they believe has permeated the society. At the same time, they are both certain that their understanding of Islam and their way of reform is ‘the right way’ and that evil—including blasphemers—should be eliminated from the society. They would have found each other’s views deviant, impure, and a part of the evil that they want to eliminate. Naveeda Khan (2012) narrated a scene of a religious argument in a library between people with similar disagreements as those between Jamal and Mahmood concerning the proper practise of Islam. She remarked, ‘trembling as I left, I wondered just how close I

had come that day to witnessing a physical fight and a possible accusation of blasphemy against the Prophet' (4). Khan's fear was not misplaced, as the desire to achieve purity and eliminate evil, when there are conflicting notions of purity, can indeed lead to blasphemy accusations. I argue that the moral anxiety of the accusers is an important factor in understanding the blasphemy accusations in Pakistan.

In present-day Pakistan, the personal sense of guilt and sin amongst the believers is coupled with a collective sense of being attacked, being treated unjustly, being victimised and targeted by the world as well as by their own government. There is a sense of collective helplessness and frustration at the present state of things, whether it be the national politics or the global order of the nations. There is a pervasive consciousness that nothing can be done about poverty, corruption, their national image in the world, and their fight against western powers and the influence of westernisation and globalisation domestically. With the rapid spread of diverse ideas in the society, specifically with the rise of social media (there have been several online forums criticising the traditional religious and cultural practices), the modern Pakistani Muslim finds itself in a state of moral torment. So, the self's purity (as well as the collective purity as the *raison d'être* of Pakistan) needs to be constantly asserted. The morally perturbed Pakistanis want to stage their discomfort and disapproval, by violent means if necessary, so that their message is effective and clear not only to the government but also to the world and those within the society who have been corrupted by outside influences.

It is within this context that blasphemy accusations become a mechanism for dealing with widespread moral anxiety and the desire for self-purification. Most studies of blasphemy in Pakistan have argued that blasphemy accusations are usually a result of personal rivalries, and blasphemy laws are used instrumentally (or 'abused' or 'misused') to settle personal scores (see e.g., Dobras 2009; Hoffman 2014; A. Khan 2015; Siddique and Hayat 2008; Uddin 2011). I argued in the introduction against the law-centric understanding of the blasphemy accusations and subsequent chapters will further elaborate on that. In this chapter, I want to expand the understanding of the motivations behind the blasphemy accusations regardless of whether they are referred to the state law or not. While a substantial number of blasphemy accusations indeed arise from personal rivalries and grievances between the people, as the 'instrumental use' thesis posits, this explanation does not apply to all incidents. There are incidents in which the accusers are driven by personal piety rather than vengeance. Even in cases in which the immediate motivation of the accuser is personal vengeance, the wider

support of the accuser cannot be fully explained by the ‘instrumental use’ thesis alone. In fact, as the examples in this chapter will show, in most instances it is difficult to categorise the causes of blasphemy accusations neatly as ‘personal vengeance’ or ‘religious piety’.

The accuser can thus be a *vengeful person*, or a *becoming Muslim*—to use Naveeda Khan’s (2012) term—or *both at the same time*. The *vengeful person* is driven by a violation that may not be religious in nature but is still considered a transgression of social hierarchies or norms. The violation may be an aberration of character with respect to the expectations, a nonconformity with the expected roles and behaviour, or a transgression of the established order of social hierarchy. The *becoming Muslim* is motivated by a sense of guilt and sin, living in a state of moral torment, constantly striving to be a good Muslim, the benchmark for which is set by the modern nation state of Pakistan and the dominant religious rhetoric, and continues to be raised higher. However, I argue that most accusations are driven by elements of both vengeance *and* the concern for purity *at the same time*. I will now demonstrate this with examples of transgressions that lead to blasphemy accusations.

The Transgression: Purity and Social Hierarchy

The concern for purity is central to understanding how certain transgressions lead to blasphemy accusations in Pakistan. To understand the transgression as an impurity that needs to be removed, it is helpful to see it as a *violation* of conceptual categories and symbolic boundaries. Conceptual categories are preconceived notions of the right order of things in the society—also described as a ‘mental map’—whose alteration is considered a violation (Krohn-Hansen 1994, 372). Symbolic boundaries are ‘group-making social processes’ that consist of meaningful classifications, cultural patterns and social practices that allow social actors to perceive a symbolic order of reality concerning their group identity (Hartmann 2015, 166-169). The *violation* of conceptual categories and symbolic boundaries can lead to physical *violence* in society (ibid.). It is this dual nature of *violence* that I am concerned with. Bowman (2001) explains the etymology of the word ‘violence’ which is derived from ‘violate’ implying an ‘integral space broken into and, through that breaking, desecrated’ (25). Thus, Bowman argues, in its passive grammatical sense, ‘violate’ indicates something ‘characterized by impurity or defilement’ (ibid.). From this perspective, the transgression of social hierarchies and moral codes of conduct constitute the primary instance of *violence*. Corbin employed Douglas’s (1966) concept of ‘dirt’ as ‘matter out of place’ to make a similar

point about *violence* as a disturbance in the normal order of thoughts and ideological categories (Corbin 1976, 108). The violation of conceptual categories of purity can lead to physical violence against those deemed transgressive.

Anthropological studies of violence have shown that discourses concerning purity/impurity are frequently invoked in violent conflicts and genocides around the world. Purity discourses were conjured in some of the most violent moments in the recent history, such as the Holocaust (Hinton 1998), the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia (Hinton 2005), the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in Rwanda (Malkki 1995), and the Hindu-Sikh violence in India (Das 1996). However, while the notions of 'pure' and 'impure' are employed in a wide range of violent contexts, 'the meaning of such conceptual categories' always takes on 'distinct local forms' (Hinton 2002, 19). The Holocaust, for example, drew upon ideas of race and genes, blood, soil, bodily aesthetics, etc. to construct ideals of purity, whereas the Khmer Rouge employed agrarian metaphors and Buddhist notions of purity and impurity (ibid.). Hinton thus argued that the broad conceptual categories of us/them, and purity/impurity draw upon local cultural patterns and refer to ideas that already have some symbolic value for the specific group of people (ibid.).

Other scholars have argued that the cultural patterns and local forms that the purity discourses draw upon should not be seen as given or fixed in time. Duschinsky (2013) argued that the categories of 'pure' and 'impure' are discursively constructed within the specific socio-political circumstances (Duschinsky 2013). Appadurai also argued, while acknowledging the importance of Douglas's ideas about 'purity and category-mixture' in understanding violence, that the categories of pure and impure are not 'culturally given' (1998, 231). Instead, in his explanation of ethnic violence he demonstrated how the notions of purity and impurity are contingent upon subjectivities constructed within specific contexts (ibid.). According to Appadurai, 'purity is a matter of moral coherence' and a lack of moral coherence leads to moral anxiety, and deviant acts and thoughts can be perceived as transgressions (ibid, 236). I have demonstrated in earlier chapter how the present moral anxiety of the Pakistani Muslims is a consequence of the specific historical and political circumstances. At the micro-level, the ideas of purity and impurity are contingent upon the social hierarchies and the sensibilities of those in power when it comes to blasphemy accusations in Pakistan. Bail (2008) argued, it is important to pay attention to how symbolic boundaries or notions of purity and impurity are often chosen, 'policed or made permeable' depending on the 'interests of majority groups'

(39). In the light of this conceptualisation, I argue, blasphemy accusations are triggered by transgressions that disrupt the symbolic boundaries and moral coherence of the majority groups and those who are in power. The transgressions are subjectively perceived depending on the relationship between the accused and the accuser. The power structures within these relationships determine who is perceived as a transgressor and which ‘cognitive, affective and cultural resources’ are mobilised against them (Hartmann 2015, 166). The aim is often to punish the transgression of social hierarchies—perceived as an impurity—to reassert the moral order of the society.

The underlying ideals of purity and impurity that define a transgression also vary depending on the respective places of the accused and the accusers in the society. For example, the religious identity of the accused is an important factor that determines the perception of purity and the transgressions thereof. To demonstrate this, I will use a variety of examples: the first case is an accusation against a Muslim woman, the next two cases are accusations against Christians, and the last case is an accusation against an Ahmadi. The narratives of purity are different in each case. However, there are certain underlying themes that run through most narratives of purity presented here. The most significant of these common themes is the gendered understanding of purity. The transgressions are often conceived in terms of sexual purity of women, even when the immediate violation is not sexual at all and the accused is a man. I will return to this point after having discussed some of the cases. However, before proceeding, I would like to remind the reader that both Jamal and Mahmood referred to women when discussing their ideals (of purity) and the corruption of society. In the following examples, we shall see in further detail how narratives of purity are tied to women and their moral character.

The first case is of a Muslim woman, Marium, who was accused of blasphemy. She lived in a small *Mohalla* (neighbourhood) with narrow streets and congested houses at the periphery of Lahore. She was the principal of a small school in the locality and offered religious sermons to the women of the locality in her free time. She conducted the meetings at her house, where she preached religious teachings, and also shared her writings sometimes. She was accused of blasphemy for her allegedly deviant views, such as her saying that ‘singing the praise of the Prophet is not allowed’ and that the ‘Prophet was simply another human being’. It must be noted that these views are already held by some groups and sub-sects within Sunni Islam in Pakistan. However, Marium did not only present her ‘deviant’ views but also challenged the

existing hierarchical structure of the society. In her sermons and writings, she not only questioned the mainstream interpretations but also asserted her own right as a woman to interpret and preach religion. It was the Imam of the local mosque who officially accused her of blasphemy. The key witness presented against her was another religious cleric who used to teach Quran to her children. I met both of them (the accuser and the primary witness) several times and attended some of their court trials as well. The Imam who became the complainant against her told me:

She came to me one day with a copy of Quran and asked me to read certain verses from it. I told her that I had already read those and asked her what she wanted to say. She said that the “Quran itself has walked to you”. I asked, “how can the Quran walk to me?” She said that she is Syed, belonging to the Quraish bloodline (Prophet’s lineage) and has received revelations from God. I rebuked her by saying that she was telling a lie and that she should go away.

When I asked the Imam whether it was then he accused her of blasphemy, he surprisingly said, ‘no’. He explained to me that the women of the locality (including his wife) who used to go to Marium’s house to attend religious sermons had been telling their men (including himself) about Marium’s deviant interpretations of religion (according to him) for quite some time. He admitted that despite the fact he had heard of the ‘blasphemy’ originally through women, no action could be taken against Marium because ‘the women can’t become complainants and witnesses in the court; it would require them to visit court every week and that would not be suitable for them’. Besides, it is men who are expected to be the protectors of religion, and in effect eligible claimants of spiritual purity. He also acknowledged the delay between the occurrence of offence—which according to him continued for weeks—and the invocation of state laws against the accused. Moreover, before the state’s legal action was initiated, violent crowds besieged Marium’s house, roused by some pamphlets containing ‘deviant’ interpretations of religion that were allegedly published and distributed by Marium. It was under the pressure from the violent crowd that police eventually arrested Marium and initiated formal proceedings against her. The Imam claimed that it was he who had urged the police to intervene, ‘otherwise there would have been destruction and bloodshed’.

Having talked to the accuser and other witnesses and followed the case closely, I am of the opinion that the story about Marium visiting the Imam of the mosque and saying ‘blasphemous’ words, as alleged, was fabricated after the fact. In my view, there were two reasons behind this. First, to enhance the legitimacy of the blasphemy accusation and second,

to boost the religious authority and personal piety of the Imam—in his own eyes as well as in eyes of the public. The second point is demonstrated when he himself said:

The complainants generally stop appearing for trials because it requires a lot of commitment and religious passion to visit the court every week. Therefore, I myself became the complainant, as I did in another case that is also undergoing trial at the moment, to ensure that it is seen through to the end. Pursuing these cases provides me with a holy purpose in my life.

His religious authority in eyes of others also increased, as one of his friends who had become closer to him after this case told me,

It is because of people like him that our society is surviving in the face of such atrocious sins (as blasphemy). These people are like an embankment protecting the society from the flood of sins. It is due to these holy men holding up the society that despite the tremendous increase in grave sins such as blasphemy in the present-day, the Muslim community is still intact.

While the narrative of preventing the society from the ‘impurity’ caused by the ‘flood’ of blasphemy in present-day Pakistan provides legitimacy to the role and authority of the religious clerics, it also reinforces the presence of impurity and evil in the society and the constant need to purge it. One of the lawyers who took up the Imam’s case against Marium in the court reflected on the state of ‘sin’ (of blasphemy) in the society as follows:

Too many cases of blasphemy these days—what a shame! This is such an unfortunate time to be alive when so many people are committing blasphemy every other day. We should not even be alive. We should die from shame for having seen so many cases of blasphemy in our lives. I feel more pain for these cases than even for murder cases. There was a time when a murder used to shake everyone, but nowadays so many people are dying every day in brutal circumstances that we have become desensitised to the cruelty of murder. However, we cannot get desensitised to the issue of honour of the Prophet. Blasphemy will always remain the most heinous crime in society.

Hence, in Marium’s case, we see both the strategic instrumental use of the blasphemy laws to punish the perceived transgression of a woman challenging the Imam’s authority by providing alternate religious interpretations, and an aspiration for personal piety by removing the alleged ‘sins’ and ‘impurity’ from society, as the motivational factors behind the accusation. The *purity* in this instance is the purity of the correct religious beliefs and of religious authority according to the accuser and his supporters. Alternate interpretations of religion are a norm amongst lay people in Pakistan, as discussed earlier. However, Marium was a woman and her claim to religious authority was a challenge and hence an impurity for the existing

order of hierarchy. By punishing her transgression, the Imam reasserted the ideal moral order of society according to him, and also established the purity of his own self. This is how the blasphemy accusations grant social legitimacy to the accusers' endeavour to punish perceived transgressions, whether they are of social, moral, or religious codes of conduct and established hierarchy. Blasphemy accusations, hence, hold dual symbolic power: the power to legitimise violent action against one's rivals or those considered transgressive, and the power to grant social legitimacy, moral authority, and a license of spiritual purity to the accusers.

The second case is that of Sara, a young Christian woman from a poor family. It had rained heavily all morning that hot and humid day in early monsoon when I met Sara and her family. I travelled by car to her small town, some 200 kilometres from Lahore. Sara's brother came to a mutually agreed landmark in the town to receive me so that he could show me the directions to their place. He was riding his Honda CD70 motorbike and told me that I would have to leave the car at a certain point beyond which the streets get too narrow for any vehicle except bicycles or slim motorbikes to get through. He led the way to a market area close to his neighbourhood where the car could be parked. After disembarking from the car, we entered a convoluted area of extremely narrow streets; I gave up after a few turns trying to memorise the route to be able to find my way back. The streets were paved but had open sewage pipelines running on both sides. The rain had made the mud and garbage mixture on the streets slippery. Despite that, there were tens of children of all ages, some of them barefooted, a few little ones even bare bottomed, playing on the streets. They all stared as we walked past—Sara's brother on his bike, at a speed less than 5km/h, and I walking carefully behind him to avoid slipping off the slimy path. We walked past a mosque, and a church—within a few hundred metres of each other—as we made our way to Sara's house.

The neighbourhood is inhabited by both Christian and Muslim working-class families. While there is some spatial segregation, as some of the streets are occupied by Christians or Muslims only, the residents interact with each other regardless of their faith. There are certain limitations to those interactions, as in other parts of Pakistan; for example, Muslims do not eat at Christians' places, there is no inter-marriage, etc. Everyday interactions include trade, services, and even attending weddings and funerals of people from the other community. Rubi, a middle-aged Muslim woman who lives a few meters from the mosque in the neighbourhood and has good relations with the local Imam's family (who live next to the mosque), used to sew clothes for women in the neighbourhood. Sara's Christian family had

been her customers for several years. Rubi was the one who accused Sara of blasphemy, when on her visit to Sara's house she saw some political banners with names and pictures of politicians spread on the floor. She accused Sara of having insulted the Islamic names (of politicians) and their beards (a symbol associated with the Prophet) printed on those banners by using them as floor mats. Rubi went back and told this to the Imam of the mosque, who gathered a crowd of men and boys from the village and incited them to attack Sara and her family.

Sara's family had been living in that neighbourhood for 35 years. Rubi and her family, the Imam of the mosque, and a majority of those who gathered to set Sara and her family on fire had also been living in the same neighbourhood for decades. The two families interacted with each other regularly, but their relations and interactions were the very basis of conflict. Rubi's sister-in-law had eloped with one of Sara's cousins. While they had both returned to the community and denied that they had eloped, nobody in the neighbourhood believed them. Regardless of whether it was merely a rumour or the truth, there were several perceived transgressions within that scandal: A Muslim woman eloped, the man she eloped with was a Christian, and they returned to the community without acknowledging any guilt or responsibility.

The first retribution was against the man who had dared to commit such a transgression. All I heard from different people was that 'he could not stay in the neighbourhood any more'. Nobody said what would have been the consequence of him coming back to stay in the neighbourhood, but as it happens in other similar cases, he could very well have been killed by the woman's family. However, the transgression did not stop there as he stealthily came back to the neighbourhood on his father's funeral and stayed with Sara's family. Since it is hard to keep secrets in such a closely linked community, some people in the neighbourhood found out that the said man had visited and stayed with Sara's family. This rumour upset Rubi's family and created a friction between the two families. It was not much later that blasphemy allegations were made against Sara by Rubi. Hence, in this case, while the violation was not essentially religious in nature, it was transgressive enough, and was seen as polluting and corrupting, an effect that had to be undone by active reinforcement of purity.

Similarly, in another case, Nadir, a Christian man had an affair with a Muslim woman in his village. His brother told me that their relationship had been going on for about 15 years and

was a constant concern for the village. The Imam of the village's mosque along with other Muslims tried to convert Nadir to Islam a few times. They asked him several times to convert and marry the Muslim woman—which he did not accede to. The Imam of the mosque tried implicating him in false police cases related to sale of alcohol, but he managed to evade the charges. Eventually, when he did not concede to any threat, he was accused of blasphemy by his Muslim friend, Aslam. People from their village told me that Nadir and Aslam had known each other for years and were often seen together. Aslam accused Nadir of having sent blasphemous text messages to his phone. They had been hanging out together even the night before the accusation. In this instance, the whole case may be a conspiracy against Nadir, triggered by the perceived transgression on Nadir's part and his defiance of all disciplining methods employed by the community. It was thus perceived not simply as an impurity but also as an ongoing threat and danger to the purity of the society.

Sara and Nadir's religious identity as Christians is key to understanding the perceived transgressions in both these cases. In cases of accusations against Christians, I suggest that the physical impurity embedded in the South Asian understandings of caste is central to the perception of transgressions. I have written elsewhere about the perception of the local Christians as filthy—polluted as well as polluting—bodies, and the physical and spatial segregation between Muslims and Christians in Pakistan (Ashraf 2018, 9). Most of the Christians in Pakistan belong to lower socio-economic strata and are relegated to the menial, 'dirty' jobs: cleaning toilets, removing dung of animals, collecting garbage, etc. The physical segregation between Muslims and Christians ranges from the existence of specific Christian 'colonies' in the residential landscape to use of separate utensils and crockery for eating and drinking. The treatment of non-Muslims as a 'threat to the health and purity of Muslims' has been documented in pre-modern Muslim societies as well (Emon 2012, 133). For example, non-Muslims were required to distinguish themselves from Muslims when attending communal baths so that they could not 'pollute the water unbeknownst to the Muslims therein' (ibid.).

In the present-day Pakistan, however, Christians are considered more polluting than other non-Muslim minorities such as Sikhs. They are treated with exceptional disgust due to a combination of factors, including their usually darker skin colour and their lower socio-economic status compared to other religious minorities. The Christians' treatment as 'untouchables' can also be attributed to the persistence of 'caste ideology' with inherent ideas

of bodily purity and impurity (Fuller 1976, 68). The Christians in Pakistan are believed to have converted from lower castes of Hindus and continuing discrimination against similar groups of converts has been documented as the residue of the Hindu caste system (Dumont 1980, 203; Mosse 1996). While the Christians in Pakistan are a religious minority (identified by their religious identity as Christians), they are also categorised as a caste group in official documents. In fact, the police-reports and the court documents that I studied identified ‘Christianity’ as *zaat* (caste) instead of religion. Thus, the Christians are dually inferior in the social hierarchy, as a religious minority and as a lower caste group.

The Christians can thus transgress the social hierarchies and moral codes of conduct in both these domains: religion and caste ideology²⁸. In practice, however, the boundaries between the religion and the caste ideology are not fixed and thus physical transgressions in the non-religious domain can also be framed as religious transgressions and punished accordingly. In the cases of Sara and Nadir, for example, the transgressions were physical and sexual in nature—even though Sara was substituted for the initial transgressor. Thus, it was not only the ideals of purity based on social hierarchy and caste ideology that were threatened but also the ideals of sexual purity, which are associated with honour. Das (1996) argued in the context of Indian Punjab that ‘two values, purity and pollution on the one hand, and honour and shame on the other, are particularly important for the regulation of sexuality’ in the Punjabi society (1996, 62). The Pakistani Punjab shares the same cultural values—purity and pollution, honour and shame. The physical transgressions of the social boundaries and sexuality are thus extremely offensive in themselves and the religious identity of Sara and Nadir as Christians added more intensity to them. Hence, blasphemy accusations against Sara (in the absence of the man who was the real transgressor) and Nadir were a symbolic response to acts of perceived transgression of social hierarchy, of ideals of sexual purity, and of religious boundaries—all at the same time.

²⁸ I have discussed other examples of blasphemy accusations against Christians based on caste-based ideals of purity in a different piece of work (Ashraf 2018). The examples include accusations following: a Christian woman drinking from Muslim women’s cup, Christians spreading decorate sheets with Quranic verses written on them on one of their Saints’ graves, and a Christian woman returning the ‘polluted’ butter she had bought from a Muslim woman. There were many other examples that I came across during my fieldwork in which improper physical contact with the Christians led to accusations of blasphemy.

In the case of Christians, therefore, the caste ideology becomes a distinct factor in determining the purity, impurity, and transgression in social interactions. However, the transgressions seen as blasphemous are considered an impurity even in relation to Muslims. Interestingly, the ideals of sexual purity are invoked to prove the impurity of the accused even when the accused is a Muslim. It is a common belief amongst supporters of blasphemy-related violence, repeated to me by several of them from laymen to clerics to lawyers on separate occasions that,

Whoever commits blasphemy does so because they are literally bastards; it had been forewarned by the Prophet himself that anyone who commits blasphemy would reveal his questionable ancestry.

One of these people said to me with unshakeable conviction:

You can use modern science to determine the truth of the Prophet's saying. Go and test the DNA of any of the blasphemers and you will find that they were illegitimate children, impure by birth.

By calling the blasphemers 'illegitimate children', the accusers are questioning the moral character—linked to sexual purity—of their mothers rather than the moral character of their fathers. Thus, it is the women whose character determines whether one is pure or impure. Das remarked in the context of the Sikh militant discourses in India that 'the concern with establishing "pure ancestry" with the accompanying doubts about illegitimacy and true paternity are male doubts' (2007, 112). She argued that such an imagination of purity revealed that the community being constructed was a 'masculine nation' (ibid., 113). The tendency to question the ancestry of the alleged blasphemers demonstrates that the purity discourses invoked in the blasphemy accusations are also embedded within a masculine and patriarchal imagination of nation. The fact that the masculine ideals of sexual purity are conjured up in relation to Christians, Muslims, and other groups alike also suggests that the patriarchal notions of purity are widely applicable in the Pakistani society. In addition to questioning the ancestry of the accused, often the accusers and their supporters also highlight the 'sexual impurity' of the accused in terms of *zina* (illegitimate sexual relations). In a high-profile case of blasphemy accusation against a woman, I was told by those who supported the death punishment for her that 'she was sleeping with her sister's husband' before she was accused of blasphemy.

While the use of sexually-insulting words against those one disapproves of is common in most cultures around the world, the strong association between being blasphemous and being sexually impure—through deviant sexual conduct or by virtue of being born to sexually impure mothers—is of curious concern here. The offence of blasphemy and the offence of sexual transgression (or sexual impurity) appear to reaffirm each other. One is likely to be accused of being a blasphemer when one transgresses norms of sexual conduct (violates women), and a blasphemer is deemed inherently sexually impure. It appears to be a circular argument where the offence itself is used as evidence of its commission. However, it is significant as it offers us insights into two important arenas of thought: the moral values that are central to the culture, and the power of language. As far as the moral values are concerned, I have already argued for the centrality of the value of purity in the lives of Pakistani Muslims, and more generally in South Asia. The emphasis on sexual purity is also a reflection of the strongly patriarchal concern for control over sexuality in both the South Asian and Islamic ideals to which South Asian Muslims ascribe. More important here, I argue, is the power of language as a ‘social performative’ through which social identities are called into being (Pennycook 2004, 14). The use of words is not merely to signify something but also to *do* something. Hence, by asserting that a blasphemer is sexually impure, a socially sanctioned identity is called into being. The performative function of the language is thus ‘the discursive constitution of the subject as inextricable from the social constitution of the subject’ (Butler 1999, 120). The sanctions of sexual and religious impurity corroborate each other to construct the social identity of an alleged blasphemer. It can therefore be argued that moral sanctions are super-imposed on each other to effectively and definitively dismiss what is perceived to be transgressive or impure in the society.

The final example that I want to discuss is that of an Ahmadi man, named Rashid. He was in a relationship with a Muslim girl, Nida, whom he met at an after-school academy that they both attended. They had been talking to each other for about two years and had developed feelings for each other. Rashid wanted to marry Nida and sent a marriage proposal to her family. Nida’s mother was doubtful whether Nida already knew him, so she asked Nida to tell her everything about their relationship. It is then that Nida told her mother that Rashid was from an Ahmadi family but had ‘converted to Islam in front of her’. Nida’s mother was suspicious and told Nida not to trust Rashid because ‘Ahmadis lie about being Muslims’. Nida did not have any doubts about Rashid’s sincerity, so she was devastated to hear her mother’s

judgement. When Nida continued to insist on marrying Rashid, her mother brought her to a religious scholar for the 'expert opinion' on the matter. The religious scholar, who was friends with one of the lawyers I was meeting regularly for my research, invited the lawyer along to one of his meetings with the mother and the daughter. The lawyer, who also supported anti-blasphemy punishments, invited me as well. Thus, I met Nida and her mother in the presence of a few other people: the legal and religious experts on the matter.

Nida's mother told me how her daughter had been deceived and led astray by Rashid. She told me that she was very thankful to Allah that she found out the truth in time and brought Nida to meet the religious scholars who told her 'the realities of the Ahmadis'. She claimed that her initiative and the religious guidance from the scholar had dissuaded Nida from 'following a crooked man to hell'. She claimed that her daughter was now much safer. Tears rolled down Nida's cheeks as she nodded and said,

It is hard for me. I believed in Rashid and had developed a strong emotional attachment with him. But I guess my mother is right. I guess it is all in my better interest. After all, I do not want my kids to be born in a false religion. Maybe it is all good for the purity of my own faith. But it is very hard to accept at this time. I have started praying regularly to deal with the trauma. Allah will help me. I will be better soon.

Later there was a suggestion by someone in the room that Rashid 'posed' as a Muslim, which is a crime (according to the state law) and a serious transgression that should be punished. They contemplated how best to bring Rashid to pay for his crime. Everyone in the room tried to convince Nida to lodge a formal complaint against Rashid to ensure that he did not fool any other Muslims. I did not meet them again due to some unexpected developments in my fieldwork, so I do not know if they followed through with the complaint. But what I witnessed was a blasphemy accusation in the making. In this case, the concern was the purity of the nation and the purity of the faith.

In the cases of accusations against Ahmadis, the theme of deception forms a key concern in the perceptions of purity and transgression thereof. Appadurai (1998) also pointed out the 'tropes of deception, treachery, betrayal, imposture, and secrecy' as the sources of 'cognitive paranoia' about the identity of the enemy (234). He suggests that the fear of deception, linked to the uncertainty about the identity of the other, is inherently linked to the desire for achieving and maintaining the purity of society (ibid., 236). It is thus an impurity that is

considered even more dangerous by the very virtue of its indistinguishability from the pure. Therefore, the Ahmadis, for most Pakistani Muslims, are transgressive by the very fact of their ‘hidden’ identity because they claim to be Muslims. The possibility of corruption of society is thus seen as materialised with the very existence of the Ahmadis. Hence, the purity of the nation (based on the religious identity of Muslims) is at stake in instances of blasphemy accusations against the Ahmadis.

Through different examples of blasphemy accusations in this section, I have highlighted various underlying ideals of purity—of religious beliefs, of authority, of caste, of sexual behaviour, of women, of ancestry, of nation, and of the self—whose transgression may trigger blasphemy accusations. The cases have shown that despite the frequent instrumental use of blasphemy accusations against one’s rivals, the explanation of these accusations cannot be reduced to instrumentality. In most cases, the accusations are driven by personal vengeance as well as the underlying concerns for the purity of conceptual categories. The notions of purity are based on social hierarchies and boundaries—not only of religious identity but also of caste and other systems of stratification. Depending on the context of the case, various ideals of purity and respective moral sanctions can be superimposed onto each other to effectively discipline the transgressors. The transgressions or violations of an individual are often seen as transgressions of the community and the moral order of the society as a whole. In many cases, those ‘violated’ (for example Rubi’s sister-in-law, or Nadir’s Muslim girlfriend) do not perceive the violation as such; rather it is the defenders of the society, Imams or other men, who step in to determine the transgression and punish it. Thus, transgressions arise within inter-personal relationships but are then transformed into communal and national shame. I will discuss the escalation of the conflict into communal violence in the next chapter. For now, I would like to discuss some common features of those who are accused.

The Accused: Familiarity and The Enemy Within

Prior familiarity is a common characteristic of most blasphemy accusations in Pakistan. The cases I have discussed so far involved people who already knew each other and had an ongoing interactional relationship. The accusers and the accused can be neighbours, colleagues, linked through trade and/or exchange relationships, and sometimes even friends. Violence amongst neighbours and familiar people is not a unique or new phenomenon in these cases. Some of the most violent moments in the recent history of humanity have seen

‘familiar’ people turning against each other (for example, in Poland during the Holocaust²⁹, in Punjab and Bengal at the time of partition of the Indian sub-continent). Studies of witchcraft accusations in modern-day Indonesia have also highlighted the ‘familiarity’ of the accused as a significant factor contributing to the phenomenon. Herriman (2006, 343) writes about witchcraft being a primarily local phenomenon in which neighbours accuse each other and the whole village then violently purges the accused. Siegel in his book *Naming the Witch*, (2006, 188) argues that the uncanny other (the witch) emerges from the familiar. In his large-scale comparative study of communal violence in societies, Tambiah (1996) contended that ‘assailants and victims are frequently not strangers to one another. They have been “neighbors” in the loose sense of having lived in the same towns, or resided intermixed or side by side’ (276). Similarly, Appadurai (1998) showed through various examples of ethnic violence, ‘the transformation of neighbours and friends into monsters’ as a common feature of violence (238). He argued that it was because of the ‘uncertainty’ and ‘cognitive paranoia’ associated with those *others* within the community that they were pinned down as ‘the enemy within’ (234).

Žižek in his work *Neighbors and Other Monsters* (2006), also showed how neighbours and other familiar people occupy an ambivalent and uncertain place in society. He identified a spectrum of otherness that ranges from 1) Other as in ‘other humans like me’, 2) Other as the symbolic ‘Big Other’³⁰, that is, the rules of our social coexistence to 3) The ‘Other qua Real’, the ‘impossible thing, the inhuman partner, the other with whom no symmetrical dialogue mediated by the Symbolic order is possible’ (143). He argued that in the image of the neighbour as ‘the other like me’, always lurks the other extreme: the unfathomable, monster, radical Other (ibid.). Hence, it is the people who are known and familiar but occupy the position of the non-specific ‘other’ who can be transformed into the ‘absolute other’, against whom violence is then justified. It is the very quality of familiarity that implies some degree of ‘sameness’ due to which the enemy within must be forcibly expelled and objectified as ‘the total other’ (Tambiah 1996, 276). In doing so, the ‘difference’ with the enemy, or the

²⁹ As Gross (2001) demonstrated in his ground-breaking study of Jedwabne, Poland.

³⁰ Symbolic ‘Big Other’ is ‘the “substance” of our social existence, the impersonal set of rules that coordinate our coexistence’ (Žižek 2006, 143).

transgressions that turn them into enemy, must be exaggerated to an extent that the ‘other’ is ‘degraded, dehumanized, and compulsively obliterated’ (ibid.).

In the case of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan, I argue that familiarity is significant because it informs the perceived character of the accused in the minds of the accusers. These perceptions are not neutral benign pieces of information; rather they impact the likelihood of being ‘offended’ by the words/actions of the person in question. They shape and impact how certain actions and behaviours of a certain person are received and the reactions they generate. My broad survey of blasphemy cases—both officially registered and unofficial rumours leading to violence—reveals that blasphemy accusations overwhelmingly take place in physical and social spaces with identifiable characteristics. The physical space can be a neighbourhood, a village, a mosque, a school, a workplace, or market area. However, in most of the cases, these spaces are inhabited by lower socio-economic strata of people, with highly cohesive social networks, unlike the affluent urban areas. These are the areas where social policing of individuals and families is generally very high, whether it is clothing choices made by the neighbours or colleagues, the company one keeps, the food one eats or the social interactions one engages in. There are indirect ways of controlling people’s behaviour, such as gossip and reputation-based social relations, as well as direct ways such as accountability to local moral authorities (religious clerics, elder men of the community, or other influential members) and the mobs. Such close monitoring of social behaviour by the people around sets these places apart from more affluent and urbanised areas in cities where the social policing (along with the communal solidarity) has been in decline in recent decades.

Hence, people are generally familiar with each other’s social identity, behaviour, family background and networks in most cases of blasphemy accusations. This familiarity means that persons with lesser power in social relations are more likely to get accused. The accusers make accusations when they *know* that they can mobilise support against the person they are accusing. Moreover, the familiarity means that the accusers know which parts of the accused’s identity and behaviour can be marked as transgressive to mobilise support against them. The accusers in most incidents of blasphemy accusations are not only familiar with the names and faces of the accused beforehand, but also target major markers of their social identity (for example, Christian, Muslim, Shia, Ahmadi, Liberal, Secular, Deobandi, Sunni, etc.) and personal conduct. It is this information that determines what will be deemed

offensive and transgressive. For example, in his iconic statement before the court after killing Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab, Mumtaz Qadri proclaimed:

The personal life of Salman Taseer shows that right from early times he proved himself as an infidel. He married three times. One of his wives was “Sikh” by religion. He arranged his so-called marriage in a secret way with that lady in New Delhi in India. His lifestyle, faith and living with a lady of non-Muslim faith, reflecting his act of living in constant state of *Zina* (adultery) under the pretext of marriage (not permissible in Islam) speak volumes about his character and associated matters (Malik Muhammad Mumtaz Qadri vs The State 2015, 6).

While Qadri did not know Taseer personally, he was working as Taseer’s bodyguard. Moreover, this is a rather exceptional case because Taseer was a public personality and was known for his personal traits as well as his vocal stance against blasphemy laws. In addition, he represented the lifestyle and the political position of the Westernised elite—a whole subsection of Pakistani society. Thus, in this case, the general vilification of the alleged blasphemer’s character becomes a magnified symbolic act. In many other cases, the familiarity with the ‘character’ of the accused can determine whether the accusation takes place. Asad and Zain, accusers in another case of blasphemy against a Christian man who used to work with them, told me that the accused was training to be a Pastor. They asserted that he used to study the Bible and other religious texts of Christianity, and thus it was only expected of him to insult one of the Islamic books (a publication by a local religious leader) that belonged to the accuser. In yet another case, a man who accused one of his neighbours, a Muslim woman, of blasphemy, said to me in an interview:

Have you looked at the way she dresses? She wears jeans and goes around with open hair and so much make-up on her face. Can you expect people like her to respect our religion? She was always unobservant of Islam and one day crossed the limits.

Thus, we see, the familiarity of the accusers and the accused is of immense significance in determining the ‘offence’ or ‘violation’ that leads to blasphemy accusation. However, it is not *just* the familiarity—it is a transgression through which the familiar others cross the prescribed limits of the given relationships that lead to blasphemy accusations. In other words, it is the proximity, and a delicate balance of intimacy in those relationships, that may tip one from a familiar other to the ‘absolute Other’. It is the enemy who has crept right in, and by doing so transgressed the normal order of things. Thus, it is within such social relationships that transgressions are perceived and the decisions to punish them made.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by presenting an example that sums up the arguments made in this chapter. Altaf is a Sunni Barelwi Muslim man from Lahore in his mid-thirties. He accused a Muslim woman from his neighbourhood, who used to teach his children, of having insulted the Prophet Muhammad. The woman had allegedly told his children that ‘the Prophetic traditions are not as reliable as the Quran itself’. I met Altaf in the Lahore Sessions Court where his case was being heard. I attended several court hearings with him and talked to him before and after those hearings. One morning, as we were having tea while waiting for the hearing appointment, he said to me:

Pakistan—despite being created for the rightful practice of Islam—is inundated by a flood of sins these days. The horrendous number of blasphemy cases in today’s Pakistan is an evidence of that. Our society has been corrupted: corrupted by the filth of blasphemous thoughts and practices all around us. What else is to be expected with the rise of Western influence in media, in our schools and colleges, and everywhere else? It is up to each one of us to fight this filth, and to purify our society, to achieve the ideal Islamic land for which our ancestors sacrificed their lives.

Altaf believed that by reporting the case and appearing in the court as complainant against a woman who had allegedly committed blasphemy, he was fulfilling his moral duty of purifying the society from the filth of sins. However, his action also led him to purify his own *self* of the sin and guilt that he had been living with and establish himself as morally superior to the accused and all those who do ‘nothing’ to fight the sin in the society. He claimed,

I could not bear the shameful words uttered by this woman against Islam and our beloved Prophet Muhammad. I am not a perfect Muslim, but I would never have been able to face myself and the Prophet on the day of judgement if I did not report such a sin committed against him. I was drenched in sins—I missed my prayers and could not practice religion properly—but standing up for the love of the Prophet by bringing this woman to the court has given me great contentment. Since that day, I feel I have a mysterious spiritual power with me that will guide me to my eventual salvation. See, I stood by the Prophet today, he cannot leave me alone on the day of judgement.

Thus, by pointing out the enemies of the Prophet in levelling the accusation he claimed that the Prophet was on his side which made him feel better about his own *self* and his prospects in the afterlife despite *his own sins* and the sinful state of society. Moreover, while Altaf referred to a general state of moral decline and widespread sin in the society, he reported a

specific woman—whom he knew—in his attempt to eradicate the sin from society. In doing so, he pinned the threat of an overarching sin onto a specific target he was *familiar* with.

The blasphemy accusation in Altaf's case thus demonstrates a concern for the self's purity and piety, motivated by the feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness as a Muslim. It must be stressed that while many of the accusations are *not* triggered by religious transgressions, they are eventually expressed in terms of the *self* and the *other*. In some cases, it is the suspicion and doubt about one's own moral goodness and piety, and the underlying fear that one can be dismissed as not-good-enough (in this world, or in the afterlife), that leads to accusations of blasphemy against *others*. In other cases, it is the concern for authority and power within specific relationships that is the cause of anxiety and threat. In both cases, the accusers project their own fear and anxieties onto expendable familiar others. The *other* is an existential issue for the one who in constructing the *other* identifies and legitimises the *self*. The *others* thus created are 'containers of one's disavowed aspects' (Kakar 1990, 137). The disavowed aspects are 'unacceptable, condemned parts of the self' that are 'projected outside' (ibid.). The *other*, in this sense, 'is a transgressor of deeply-held taboos' (ibid., 138). In pointing out the *other* as the enemy, the *self* substitutes 'the enemy one harbors within oneself' (Tambiah 1996, 277). One's personal piety cannot be questioned if one accuses someone else of being impure. One must be on the right side, that is, the side of the Prophet and Allah, if one points out those on the wrong side. One's authority must be pure and legitimate if one calls those who question it impure. A similar argument is made by Siegel (2006, 203) with regard to witchcraft accusations in Indonesia. He suggested that the fear that anyone—including one's own self—can be a 'witch', is what drives people to find the 'witch' in the others. He writes:

The witch is always a dual personality. One can say that the witch is the other of the self as it goes ordinarily unexpressed. Precisely for this reason, he is unacceptable. Witchcraft is the "proof", when the possibility is pressing, that one cannot take the place of the other. That one is not oneself what one accuses the other to be; one is not him and one cannot find oneself in his place. Once the witch is expelled, the world works again as it should.

Thus, it is the possibility of the impurity of the self that leads to pointing out transgressors of symbolic boundaries and social hierarchies as *others* outside the *self*. While it is individuals who accuse each other of blasphemy, driven by individual concerns for piety and purity, the figure of the blasphemer represents more than an individual. Even though the accusations are against specific individuals, those individuals symbolise something greater than themselves:

the sin, the impure, the undesirable difference, the unacceptable change in the society. The accused are thus chosen either from the margins of the society, or from those who transgress the conceived boundaries within the society. They are familiar but not known, they are the ones who can be condemned and dismissed as killable bodies—'bare life'—with the sanction and support of the community (Agamben 1998). As Siegel (2006, 137) suggested, the witch is, 'underneath his appearance as neighbour, the embodiment of a foreign force'. The blasphemers, similarly, are the face of the haunting evil and the impure in the community—which everyone is on the lookout for because they 'know' through social media and other sources that the society is being inundated by foreign (often Western) influences, sin and impurity. It is the abstract speculative evil that is bigger than their individual experiences of evil and sin around them. Hence, the blasphemy accusations can also be called an 'attempt to give the uncanny a face' (Siegel, 2006:147).

At a structural level, the blasphemy accusations are also a result of complicated, interconnected social, political, and historical factors and circumstances. In the previous chapters, I have highlighted the conception of the 'idea of Pakistan' as a qualitative change in the course of historical events that continues to impact how the self, the community, and the other are understood and constructed in Pakistan. Moreover, the reformist movements within South Asian Islam, in response to the British colonisation, shaped not only the movement for Pakistan, but also the public religiosity of the Pakistani Muslims. While these movements started off with various groups of elite Muslim scholars who were influenced by modernity's ideals of individual responsibility and were aspiring to return to the assumed purity of an idealised bygone era, they have come to increasingly shape religious sensibilities of ordinary Muslims in Pakistan. Nevertheless, despite the undeniable significance of the historical contingencies and the role of the state of Pakistan in enabling the issue of blasphemy to become a destructive force in the society, the aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate how the larger religio-political trends are acted out by people at the local level. Thus, through the account of blasphemy accusations with an emphasis on the relationships between the accused and the accusers at the micro-level, I have demonstrated how 'the state is continually formed in the recesses of everyday life' (Das and Poole 2004, 23). It is not merely the conception of the idea of Pakistan as 'the land of the pure' that determines the use of blasphemy accusations as a mechanism of purification in the society. The practice of the same at the local level also contests and continually redraws the metaphorical borders of 'the land of the pure'.

Chapter 6 - Violence in the Making: Politics of Escalation from Accusations to Punishment

News such as the lynching of Mashal Khan in April 2017, the burning of the Christian couple Shama and Shahzad in November 2014, the torching of the Christian neighbourhood Joseph Colony in March 2013, and other such incidents of ‘mob violence’ following blasphemy accusations make headlines, invoking shock and horror amongst the humanitarian circles both nationally and internationally. However, we hardly ever get to see how the blasphemy accusations led to those incidents of violence. What happened between the accusation and the punishment? As discussed in the previous chapter, an accusation is usually made within micro-level, inter-personal relationships. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how inter-personal conflicts, already intensified by blasphemy accusations, are transformed into collective violence. Not all blasphemy accusations lead to collective violence, but when they do, there may be different types of collective violence based on the identity of the accused. When the accused is a Muslim, as in the case of Mashal Khan, the collective violence is targeted at the individual. When the accused is a non-Muslim, there is a potential for collective violence to take the form of communal violence in which the whole community/neighbourhood of the accused are targeted. In both scenarios, there is an escalation of the conflict from the inter-personal to collective, and from a single incident to a communal concern. I argue in this chapter that blasphemy accusations do not inevitably lead to violence; rather various factors and individuals come together in the process of escalation to *make* the violence possible.

The previous chapter showed that the potential for conflict is embedded within inter-personal relationships in the form of ideals of purity and hierarchy whose transgression may lead to violence. I also argued that the blasphemy accusations are often a response to a culmination of factors that are seen as impurities and challenges to the existing moral order of the society. Veena Das (1990) argued that in order for the ‘diffused hostilities to translate themselves into violent conflict, a contiguity has to be established between specific, concrete, and local issues on the one hand, and a master symbol on the other, in terms of which the conflict is viewed in the public consciousness’ (14). In the case of blasphemy accusations, the ‘master symbol’ is created in the very moment a transgression is framed as blasphemy. The face-to-face relations are thus stripped of ‘the concreteness of relationships’ and replaced with ‘imagined identities’

within the instance of the accusation (Das and Kleinman 2000, 9). The escalation that follows further sharpens the symbolism and generalisation since the crowds are not concerned with the nature and details of the original offence but with the symbolic figure of the blasphemer. While the accusations are driven by the individual concern for purification, it is quickly turned into a communal urge to remove the threat of impurity to achieve the idealised ‘pure’ society. Stanley J. Tambiah (1996), in his work on collective violence, proposed the concepts of focalization and transvaluation to understand the process of escalation (192). Focalization is ‘the process of progressive denudation of local incidents and disputes of their particulars of context and their aggregation’ and transvaluation is ‘the parallel process of assimilating particulars to a larger, collective, more enduring, and therefore less context-bound, cause or interest’ (ibid.). This chapter will illustrate how *focalization* and *transvaluation* are crucial to the *making* of collective violence against those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan.

I call it the *making* of collective violence because a blasphemy accusation—despite all the symbolism attached to it—does not automatically lead to collective violence. In fact, the journey from the accusation to the punishment may take several courses, depending on the circumstances and inclinations of various people who get involved in the situation. The accusations may lead to invocation of state laws against the accused, or non-state violence, or both. In rare cases, the charges may be dropped, and a resolution reached without any serious punishment. I argue that the outcome of the conflict—the form of punishment delivered—is determined by various *actors* who get involved at different stages of the conflict. Das and Kleinman (2001) emphasised the significance of ‘the entanglement of various social actors, ranging from global institutions to modern states on the one hand and small local communities inhabiting increasingly uncertain world on the other, in the production and authorization of collective violence’ (2). Having discussed the role of the state earlier, in this chapter I will focus on the local level actors such as police officers, local Imams and religious leaders, politicians, local government representatives, NGOs, activists, and journalists. Through an emphasis on the role of actors who are involved in the *production* and *making* of the violence, I argue that the course of action chosen after the blasphemy accusations is not entirely arbitrary. Neither is collective violence—when it happens—a *sudden* outburst or eruption of emotionally charged masses. At every step of the process, individuals involved have a range of choices available to them and it is through a successive culmination of *choices* made by the actors involved that violence becomes possible.

Some of these actors, such as the local Imams and religious leaders, play the most vital role in the ‘authorization of collective violence’. They are ‘propagandists’, key to the process of escalation, ‘who appeal to larger, more emotive, more enduring (and therefore less context-bound) loyalties and cleavages’ such as those of religion and national identity (Tambiah 1996, 192). Paul Brass (2003b), in his study of communal violence in India, also identified some key actors who play crucial roles in the orchestration of violence, such as informers, propagandists, recruiters of the mob, rumour-mongers, fire-tenders and conversion specialists (ibid., 32-33). Brass found ‘fire tenders’ and ‘conversion specialists’ to be of key significance in the making of collective violence (ibid.). The fire tenders are those who keep ‘the embers of communal animosities alive’ and the conversion specialists ‘decide when a trivial everyday incident will be exaggerated and placed into the communal system of talk, the communal discourse, and allowed to escalate into communal violence’ (ibid.). The local Imams and religious leaders act as both fire tenders—through dissemination of absolutist religious discourse—and conversion specialists—by turning a specific incident of transgression into a communal issue and instigating violent emotions amongst the wider community. Similarly, other actors—particularly the police, government representatives, politicians, NGOs, and journalists—play important roles in either constraining or enabling the violent action. I will discuss the motivations of these actors and impact of their choices on the outcome of the conflict.

Exclusive focus on the role of actors in the production of violence has been criticised as an instrumentalist approach. One of the strongest critics of the instrumentalist approach, Sudhir Kakar, argued that this approach ‘underplays or downright denies that there are “instigatees”, too, whose participation is essential to transform animosity between religious groups into violence. The picture it holds up of evil politicians and innocent masses is certainly attractive since it permits us a disavowal of our own impulses toward violence and vicious ethnocentrism’ allowing ‘a projection of the unacceptable parts of ourselves onto “bad” politicians’ (Kakar 1996, 151). Blom and Jaoul (2008), in their critique of Brass’s theory, also argued that he presents an instrumental approach that ignores the ‘popular agency and meanings that are actively involved in the production of communal violence’ (4). They further contended that an exclusive emphasis on how the actors ‘manipulate, manage and organize’ the feelings and emotions of people understates the role of emotions (ibid., 14). Instead, they argue, emotional and affective aspects are as significant to mobilisation for collective

violence as the cognitive ones (ibid., 13). Not only are people's emotions powerful in their own right, rather than being simply a resource to be 'mobilized' by their leaders, but the 'entrepreneurs' of violence might themselves have emotional stakes in the issues (ibid., 14). I have already argued in my thesis that emotion and reason are mutually constitutive, and I employ the same framework to understand the production of collective violence in this chapter.

While the role of actors in the *making* of violence is important, it is equally important to understand that violence is *meaningful* and draws upon shared emotional and symbolic repositories. As Das (1990) contended, 'there is no contradiction between the fact that, on the one hand, mob violence may be highly organized ... and on the other that crowds draw upon repositories of unconscious images' (28). Crowds are 'disciplined', 'have clear objectives', and 'are often fighting for the restoration of a moral order' (Das 1990, 27). At the same time, they draw upon 'powerful symbolic images' and exhibit 'states of heightened emotion' (ibid., 25). Similar arguments have been made by other scholars with regard to simultaneous organised and passionate nature of crowds in the *making* of collective violence (see e.g., Sidel 2006, 13; Tambiah 1996, 270). Paul Brass, often criticised for his instrumentalist approach, himself acknowledged that instances of collective violence,

combine objective and intentional factors, spontaneity and planning, chaos and organization. They are best conceived as dramatic productions in which the directors are not in complete control, the cast of characters varies—some of them being paid, some of them acting voluntarily for loot or fun—and many of the parts have been rehearsed, but others have not (Brass 2003b, 32).

Similarly, according to Horowitz (2001), ethnic and communal violence is a 'bizarre fusion of coherence and frenzy' (12), and 'an amalgam of apparently rational-purposive behaviour and irrational-brutal behaviour' (13). While I disagree with the characterisation of emotional and affective aspects of collective action as representing 'chaos', 'frenzy', or 'irrational-brutal behaviour' and see them instead as manifestations of symbolic structures, it is important to emphasise that collective action is both pre-meditated and passionate at the same time.

Therefore, in understanding the process of escalation that leads from blasphemy accusations to violent non-state punishment, I employ an integrative approach in which I explain the *organisation* of violence as well as what it *means* to those involved. This chapter will demonstrate that collective violence against those accused of blasphemy draws upon certain

repertoires of action, symbolic structures or ‘web of signifiers’ (Das 1990, 9), and wider moral narratives. I will also elucidate how various actors exercise their agency and derive their own meanings from the situation once it has turned into a societal and communal issue and how in doing so, they determine the outcome of the conflict. It is the contiguity established through the decisions and actions of various actors that enables the violent action to take place. However, it should be kept in mind that the individual actors, while exercising their agency, are also limited by the wider structures and religio-national narratives within which they operate (Das and Kleinman 2000, 16-17). Hence, collective violence against those accused of blasphemy is produced within the struggle for collective *as well as* individual identities, economic and political interests, and moral concerns.

The Process of Escalation

In most cases of blasphemy accusations followed by some form of collective mobilisation and/or violence, a rough pattern can be drawn. The events that follow the accusation usually involve the stages identified in Figure 1.

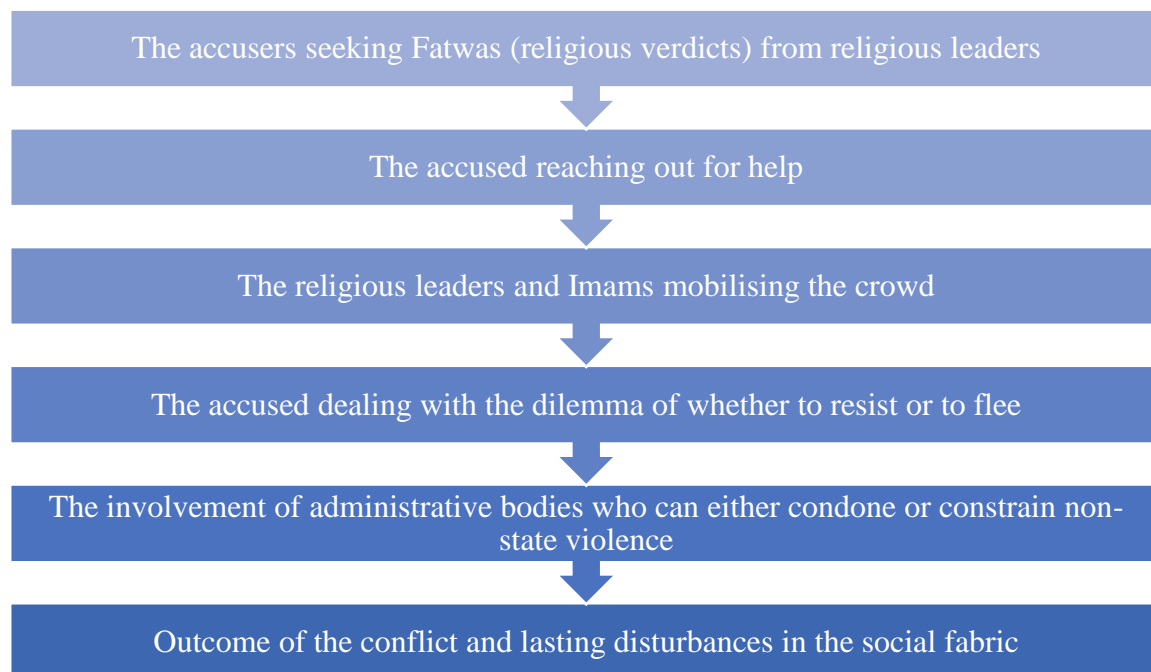


Figure 1: The process of escalation from accusation to punishment

It is important to stress here that this process, as a complete unit, is not inevitable. As already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, out of more than 1500 cases of accusations

between 1987 and 2017, only 75 have led to non-state killings. Some of the non-state killings have been carried out by individuals such as police officers, security guards, and other non-state actors. Thus, the number of times an accusation leads to collective violence is more of an abnormality rather than a norm—making it even more vital to understand the specific factors that *enable* collective violence in those specific cases. Moreover, there are cases in which mobilisation for violent action occurs, following some of the phases identified in Figure 1, but does not lead to a killing. There may be other forms of damage incurred in those cases, such as looting and burning of properties, but violent killing of the accused does not take place. There are also instances in which the prime accused manages to escape violence but someone close to them is punished in their place. Even in cases in which the collective action follows through to the violent killing of the accused, there may be an overlap or reversal of order between the stages identified above. Therefore, the process identified in Figure 1 should be seen as fluid and fragmented at best, and the actual form in each case is contingent upon the specific context of the case.

Nevertheless, these stages roughly form a repertoire of collective action, a concept first introduced by Charles Tilly (1986, 390). Repertoire of collective action is the usual form an instance of collective violence takes in the given context. In the case of blasphemy accusations leading to subsequent violence in Pakistan, the above stages have become a common course of action, even though most cases do not go through every stage. Each stage further draws upon certain repertoires of action and cultural symbols. Tambiah (1996) presented a rather comprehensive list of sources that may be included in these repertoires:

The repertoire and capacities that constitute the cultural capital and arsenal from which the component units and phases of collective violence are drawn include the following: the calendar of festivals, the stock of performances, processions, orations, and public protests; stereotyped labelings and rumors, formally recognized insults, triggering actions, and shamings; and the array of communications media (newspapers, posters, television, VCRs, tapes, etc.) available and deployed. All these help shape the swirls, cumulative rhythms, and phased transitions, in the rise and fall of collective violence in public arenas (296).

Some of the sources, corresponding to categories identified by Tambiah, commonly drawn upon in the cases of violent action following blasphemy accusations include: the Friday prayers and sermons, mosques and mosque loudspeakers, mobile phones and social media. The cases in this chapter will elaborate how these sources are employed. I divide the rest of this chapter into the six phases I have highlighted in Figure 1. Different actors take the lead

roles in different phases, even though the stages may be occurring simultaneously or in a different order, as already pointed out. While I focus on specific actors at different points in my discussion, it must be kept in mind that several actors may be concurrently active. The following discussion will demonstrate how contingency between certain actors and their actions at certain points is established in a way that leads to collective violence.

Seeking Fatwas: Authorisation of Violence

In most cases of blasphemy accusations, the immediate step taken by the accusers after they have framed a transgression as blasphemous is to reach out to local Imams or religious scholars. Even in the most abrupt-looking instances of collective violence, such as the lynching of Mashal Khan, the accusers approach the religious scholars to seek their *Fatwas* (religious verdicts) on the matter. The verdicts from the Imams or religious scholars affirm that ‘the offence’ was committed and that it was blasphemous. They also suggest the subsequent courses of action to be taken—whether the case should be reported to the police or the accused killed outside the state’s legal system. The Imams and the religious scholars thus have the authority to legitimise violence against the accused. In almost every case I studied, the accusers had approached the religious leaders to prove the legitimacy of the accusation. In a particularly extreme case, the accusers consulted several major religious centres of their sect to seek their verdicts on the matter. In other instances, the opinion of the cleric from the local mosque is considered sufficient to prove that blasphemy was committed. Nevertheless, some form of religious authority is called upon to legitimise violence against the accused. The following two examples will demonstrate how the Imams were approached by the accusers and the impact that their verdicts had on the escalation of the conflict.

Saleem is a poor Christian man, who worked as a sweeper at a Rural Health Centre, in a small town about 4 kilometres from his village in central Punjab. He was accused of blasphemy by his co-workers who had allegedly found a derogatory video against the Prophet Muhammad on his phone. He was beaten up by his co-workers who worked at the health centre pharmacy following the accusations, but the management dispersed the group. The day after his co-workers accused him of blasphemy, Saleem went back to his job as usual, hoping that his colleagues’ anger would have subsided, and the situation would be back to normal. There was very little activity besides the regular work routine, but Shahzad, the prime accuser who was most angry, was suspiciously absent from the scene. On the third day, Saleem went back to

the health centre pharmacy and apologised again to the men who worked there. They told him that they had forgiven him but that Shahzad, who was still absent, was very angry at him. They advised him to talk to Shahzad over the phone and ask him for forgiveness.

They dialled Shahzad's number and when Saleem spoke to him, Shahzad told him (Saleem) that he (Shahzad) had gone to a nearby town to fetch a fatwa from a Mufti declaring that Saleem had committed blasphemy and must be killed. Shahzad told Saleem that he (Saleem) will not be spared for his crime. Upon hearing this, one of the men at the pharmacy advised Saleem to go back to his village. He acknowledged that the situation was out of their control, as a fatwa had been issued against Saleem. It should be noted here that while some of Saleem's colleagues were forgiving and willing to help him, it was the uncompromising wrath of one person that led to further developments in the case. It is important because at most stages of the escalation, all it takes is one person in a certain position of power taking a particular decision to push the conflict into a violent direction. Saleem quit his job and went back to his village but the fatwa led to a violent mobilisation against Saleem that I will return to later in this chapter. For now, it is important to emphasise the role of the religious scholar approached by Shahzad in legitimating violence against Saleem. Once the fatwa was issued stating that Saleem had committed blasphemy because he had an allegedly blasphemous video on his phone, the details and authenticity of the accusation were no longer important. The word that went around was the 'established' claim that Saleem had committed blasphemy and must be killed.

Similarly, in another case, the accuser got a fatwa from his religious leader and told the apologising relatives of the accused that 'it was too late' for them to seek peaceful resolution. Asad, a Sunni Muslim man, worked as a delivery driver at a glass shop in a busy market area in Lahore. The shop was owned by a Christian man and the accountant at the shop was also a Christian. One day the accountant was absent and his brother, Rahim, who was training to be a pastor was filling in for him. Asad accused Rahim of writing insulting remarks about the Prophet Muhammad on one of the Islamic books belonging to Asad that he had left in the shop 'to read in his free time'³¹. After the accusation, Asad took the allegedly desecrated book

³¹ There were a few copies of Bible at the shop. One of the books present at the shop, that belonged to Asad, was an Urdu publication titled *Mainay Bible se poocha Quran kyun jalay* (I asked Bible why Quran was burnt) by Maulana Amir Hamza, a self-proclaimed religious scholar who is also one of the founders of banned militant

to the Jamaat-ud-Dawa *Markaz* (religious centre) in Township, Lahore, where he is a member and visits regularly. His religious leader, ‘Hafiz Sahab’ as he called him, affirmed that Rahim had committed blasphemy and must be punished. The owner of the shop and Rahim’s brother kept calling Asad to persuade him to sit down with them and ‘sort the issue out by talking’. They besought forgiveness for Rahim. However, in Asad’s words, ‘it was too late’ as he had already obtained a fatwa on the matter which meant that no compromise was possible. In this instance, the offence was eventually reported to the police and a trial according to the state law was initiated. However, before that, the fatwa was used to mobilise a crowd that vandalised the shop where Rahim worked and pressurised police to arrest Rahim and register a case against him.

In both cases, the fatwa legitimised the punishment of the accused regardless of the verdict of the state’s courts. Blom and Jaoul, adopting French author Jeanne Favret-Saada’s concept, asserted that the ‘mechanism’ of an outrage involves three parties: ‘someone who denounces’, ‘a referent denounced as “outraging”’ and ‘a given authority called upon to intervene’ (2008, 9). The fact that the local Imams and religious scholars are often approached *before* the police or any other governmental authority suggests that they have as much authority, if not more, as the state to legitimise violence. The religious scholars may refer the case to police, or become complainants themselves, but the fact that they are sought as an authority on the matter is important. It shows that for the accusers and their supporters, the state of Pakistan, its laws and law enforcing bodies, are not the only—or even primary—sources of authority. In the case of blasphemy accusations, the religious scholars have the power to stamp legitimacy on the accusations and the subsequent violence. The religious scholars approached for fatwas have the power to direct the conflict either towards state or non-state punishments, towards either a violent or a peaceful solution.

organisation *Lashkar-e-Taiba*. Asad, along with his Muslim friend Zain, came into the shop and saw Rahim studying the above-mentioned book—that belonged to Asad—alongside a copy of Bible. Asad claimed that he ignored Rahim, thinking ‘he might be interested in learning about Islam and may get inspired to convert’. Asad claimed that the next day he found some comments scribbled in the margins of the book cursing the author of the book, Muslims, and the Prophet Muhammad.

Moreover, as Fox (2000) suggested, the ‘clergy and other religious elites’ are ‘the most visible and authoritative arbiters of religious legitimacy’ as they can grant ‘the aura of religious legitimacy’ to even the most secular of the conflicts (15). Through their fatwas the Imams and religious scholars strip the mundane details of the perceived transgressions, that may not always be religious in nature, and establish the accusations as definitively religious offences. This is a major step in escalation, as it sets the processes of focalization and transvaluation into motion with great force. Once the fatwas have been issued, the word that circulates is void of the inter-personal contextual details of the accusations. It is a rumour in Das’s sense of the term insofar as its ‘form of language, its force, its lack of signature’ and ‘its appeals to the uncanny’ are concerned (1998, 125). It creates the figure of a blasphemer, the *Other*, who must be punished to purify the society.

Reaching Out for Help: Opportunism and Mistrust

As soon as the accused realise that they will not receive forgiveness for their perceived crime, they turn to their neighbours, family, religious community, NGOs, and sometimes police for help. These relationships are, however, rife with various tensions and mistrust, as the following discussion will demonstrate. When Shahzad told Saleem that he had attained a fatwa according to which Saleem must be killed, he (Saleem) went back to his village and shared his story with Daniyal, his neighbour and friend. Daniyal, a security guard by profession and a socially active man in his Christian neighbourhood, was the head of the local Church committee. I met him two months after the incident took place, when he was himself living in hiding, because he had enraged the accuser and the Muslim community by helping Saleem. He recollected his response upon hearing the news of blasphemy accusation against Saleem in these words,

Our Christian community is generally not organised, and we do not have any formal way to consult each other. Due to the lack of proper organisation, I had taken the initiative and brought a few young men from our community together to form a small Church committee. I was the president of that committee and we operated under the church of the nearest urban centre³². But the priests and fathers in the church are very weak. They are either cowards or work for their own interests. They do not stand for the Christian community. I called the Father in our church, but he told me not to get

³² Name of the city intentionally removed from the account

involved with the matter (of blasphemy accusation) in any way. He suggested not to help Saleem or his family and to stay away from them; he said, “Don’t go to his house even if the Muslims kill him.”

While Daniyal was worried for his friend Saleem, he was extremely disappointed in the Church and his religious leaders. He went on,

See, we are common people, but the Fathers always wear the robes of piety and spirituality, regardless of which they are so self-serving. I told the Father that I will help Saleem because he is a part of my community. I said to him that he can keep his “Fathership” to himself, I will do my duty. I also knew the Father in another town where my brother-in-law lives. I decided to contact Father Anthony from my brother-in-law’s city. I went to see Father Anthony along with three other men from our Christian community. I was aware that Father Anthony was also not to be trusted as we had had troubles with him in the past. We see the Fathers as a shadow of Jesus, but they have absolutely none of the qualities of the Jesus Christ. They are an embodiment of Satan instead. Even Muslim clerics are better than the Christian priests. They are selfish and greedy. Father Anthony agreed to give shelter to Saleem but later it turned out that he was also working in his own interests. He wanted to “sell” the issue and make money off it. He thought he would present Saleem as victim and receive money from Church organisations outside Pakistan.

The expression of disappointment with the local Christian priests remained an important part of my subsequent conversations with Daniyal. He felt deceived and betrayed by his own people—the people of the same faith who were supposed to look after each other in his view. Daniyal’s sentiments reflect the unravelling of the true nature of social relations, described as a key characteristic of social crises by Turner. He suggested, ‘in social dramas, false friendship is winnowed from true communality of interests; the limits of consensus are reached and realized; real power emerges from behind the facade of authority’ (Turner 1980, 151). While the situations of crisis unearth the true loyalties (or absence thereof) of specific individuals in question, the underlying tensions in the social relations are already present in the form of widespread mistrust and conspiracy theories amongst the people. Every incident strengthens these widespread fears and perceptions, but the disappointment of individuals in each situation is unique to their subjective experiences.

The feelings of mistrust were expressed by my other Christian participants as well who blamed the Christian clergy, whom they looked up to, of being self-interested and cowardly. However, it was not only the priests and other religious leaders whom they mistrusted, they had similarly critical opinions of Christian NGOs and Human Rights Organisations—whom they turn to for help. They complained about their insensitive manners, and the way they

exploit the situations of crisis, such as blasphemy accusations, to make money and get foreign donations. Daniyal explained that most of the Christian social workers, who are supposed to work for the welfare of the Christian community in Pakistan, are least concerned with the plight of the Christian minority. They visit the sites of incidences of blasphemy accusations and violence against Christians, take pictures with the accused and their families, post those pictures on various media platforms, but never return to help those in vulnerable situations. In fact, by exposing their faces to the world through various media, they contribute to the vulnerability of the accused instead of helping them. A young girl accused of blasphemy in another case, echoed this concern when she complained,

Some people from this NGO visited me right after the accusation. They have now put my pictures on the internet, asking people to pray for me. But everyone in our neighbourhood has seen my pictures and if I ever go out, they can recognise me and tell others that I am the one who committed blasphemy. That is why I cannot live in my neighbourhood anymore, even though the accusations were proven to be false and the case against me was dropped by police.

Yet, in doing so, the NGOs aim to claim donations from foreign funding organisations in the name of humanitarian aid. Similar concerns were highlighted by various other participants of my research including Christians and other minority members accused of blasphemy, lawyers representing them in the state's courts, and even social workers themselves who accused *other* social workers of being dishonest and corrupt. The social workers also complained about the accused *themselves* conspiring to be *victims* of blasphemy accusations to seek asylum in foreign countries. They suggested that the accused themselves wanted to 'sell' their stories to get attention from foreign media and be 'rescued' to get refuge in Western countries.

Interestingly, the affected persons from different religious backgrounds also accused each other of concocting their own tragedies of blasphemy-related violence. For example, the Christians complained that the Ahmadis, the proportionally largest group among those accused of blasphemy, intentionally get themselves implicated in blasphemy cases so that they can flee the country. They also lamented that such self-serving conduct by certain people compromises the chances of receiving help for the *real victims* (themselves). Even more striking were the complaints from the accusers who support killing the alleged blasphemers. They argued that there are certain cases in which the accused intentionally and deliberately provoke Muslims (by insulting their religion) so that they can pose themselves as *victims* in front of the international community and escape the country. I believe that the suspicions of

corruption amongst the social workers and the wider mistrust of other people by the accused, reflects to some extent the general attitudes of Pakistanis mired in corruption and economic uncertainty. Due to common knowledge of widespread corruption in the country, Pakistanis are generally mistrusting of other people, the government and non-government organisations when it comes to the distribution of limited resources.

While all the groups complaining of dishonesty amongst the accused pointed out specific cases to me in which they thought the accused had ulterior motives, I did not find any evidence to support these suspicions. However, in my own interactions with the accused, their desire/hope to seek asylum in a foreign country and/or receive financial help from foreign donor bodies did come up several times. Given that these people knew I had some connection to Australia, even though they were unsure of my capability to help them, it was not surprising that they brought up the idea of any possible help they could receive through me quite frequently. One of my respondents, a Christian man accused of blasphemy, asked me if I could talk to Church organisations in Australia on his behalf. In another extreme case, the accused, also a Christian man, told me of his plans to cross the border illegally to get to Europe. He hoped to be able to seek asylum there and ‘raise the issue of the plight of the Christian minority in Pakistan with the European Union’. He also exclaimed that he was quite hopeful that once Donald Trump came into power, he would save the Christians of all the world, including the Christian community of Pakistan from their fate at the hands of the Muslims.

While most of these assumptions and speculations amongst various groups of people are based on widespread mistrust, there is certainly some opportunism operating around the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan. Das and Kleinman (2001) suggested that ‘the media and the human rights organizations play an important role not only in representing the violence but also in becoming actors in the anticipations of local communities on how their suffering is to be addressed’ (25). In terms of representing the violence, the photos of the victims are shared ‘as if their experiences were commodities that were being advertised’ (Das and Kleinman 2000, 4). In doing so, the NGOs aim to receive funding from foreign donor bodies, for which they compete against a host of other local NGOs. As Cottle noted, ‘Aid agencies now co-exist and compete for media attention and donor funds within an increasingly crowded field’ (2008, 149). Within this competitive environment, the representations of violence—and of victims of potential violence—are geared towards ‘exactly what the media require’ (ibid., 151). In terms

of shaping the expectations of the victims on ‘how their suffering is to be addressed’, the NGOs establish the ideas of seeking asylum and receiving financial help as desirable outcomes for the victims. While there are some NGOs and social workers who are genuinely working to aid those accused of blasphemy, the majority of accused end up feeling frustrated and left-out in this system of limited resources and high expectations.

Regardless of the actual help that the accused seek and those with resources and power can provide, the wider perceptions as well as actual experiences of betrayal by individuals give rise to a widespread mistrust that complicates the possibility of seeking and receiving help for the victims. It leaves the accused in a vulnerable position without any reliable sources of legal, financial, and social support. In the times of crises, the accused often experience a sense of powerlessness as friends, neighbours, religious leaders, and social workers let them down, and *other* victims—or ‘fake’ victims—usurp the limited resources available. NGOs, and social workers are key actors who can determine the course of action the conflict will take. A few of the accused thanked the NGOs and social workers who had stepped in at the right moment to help them and their families flee the conflict and save their lives. Nevertheless, most of the accused felt left out and frustrated because they could not receive proper help. The failure of religious leaders, NGOs, and social workers to provide appropriate help to the accused may be due to limited resources or their own political and economic interests. Nevertheless, the actions taken by these actors also contribute to determining the fate of the accused. While the accused struggle with finding reliable sources of support in the face of threat, the accusers can usually mobilise multiple sources of patronage within a short duration of time through established religious organisations, mosques, and local leaders.

Mobilising the crowds: The Role of Mosques, Local Imams, and Religious Organisations

While Daniyal managed to find a temporary shelter for Saleem to protect him from Shahzad’s wrath, soon it was not only Shahzad who was after Saleem’s life. He was joined in his fury by hundreds more. In this section, I will explain the process of mobilisation of the violent crowd against the whole Christian community of Saleem’s village. A few days after the initial accusation, Shahzad shared the news of Saleem’s blasphemy with Akbar, a Muslim resident of Saleem’s village. Akbar shared it with two other Muslim members of the community. The

three of them discussed the matter and took it to the mosque committee. The mosque committee included a chairman and eleven other members. They were respectable (due to their religiosity), economically well-off and socially influential. They were not formally involved in politics but had an active role in their community. The mosque committee discussed the matter amongst themselves and decided to escalate the matter further to encourage the residents of their village to punish a ‘blasphemer’. The decision by the mosque committee is another example of *deliberate* decisions taken by the actors to influence the outcome of the conflict. The members of the mosque committee shared the news of blasphemy committed by a resident of their village with the local Muslims in the mosque who started looking for Saleem and keeping an eye on who was visiting Saleem’s house and meeting his family.

The use of the mosque as the socio-political public space where masses are mobilised and roused for collective action is another common feature of most instances of blasphemy related violence. Sidel (2006) found a similar pattern in his study of religious riots in Indonesia. He notes, ‘in virtually every case, the “assembling process” involved mosques ... and other sites of Islamic worship and schooling as key locations for mobilization in defense of the faith’ (103). Veena Das (1990) highlighted the key role of ‘symbolic space’ in mobilisation for collective action (9). Mosques are communal spaces that bring the residents of a village or neighbourhood together on a regular basis and also hold symbolic value as a sacred space in Islam. Mosques also allow the use of loudspeakers to inform the people—even those who do not attend the mosque regularly—of blasphemy accusations and incite them to violent action. The ‘call’ to violent action, when coming from a mosque, has a symbolic affinity with the ‘call to prayer’—call to display one’s loyalty to Allah. The sound of the ‘noisy propaganda—such as through orations and speeches amplified through loudspeakers’ also has a capacity to generate visceral and affective responses (Tambiah 1996, 232). The use of mosque and the loudspeakers, however, depends on the inclinations of the Imam of the mosque, who, as I have already mentioned, is the key actor in the mobilisation of violent crowds.

On a few exceptional occasions, the Imams have played a positive role by trying to appease the community and prevent violent action (Sirajuddin 2017). In some other cases, the Imams and clerics have referred the accused to be dealt with by police and state courts, through accepted channels of state law. In such circumstances, the local clerics may be playing a dual role: of inciting the public to violence and of handing over the case to the police at the same

time. The galvanised crowds are in fact used as a threat to pressurise the law enforcing bodies of the state. The local Imam of a small neighbourhood in Lahore told me that while he ‘publicly condemned the offence committed by the accused and incited the attendees in his sermons, he called the police himself when the crowd resorted to vigilantism. He said, ‘as I saw the crowd getting violent, I called the police and told them that if they do not arrest the accused soon, there will be acute violence because people are so ferocious, they are uncontrollable’. Thus, while he provoked the masses against the accused in the first place, he withdrew from the responsibility of potential violence by calling the police at the last moment. There are also a considerable number of cases in which the Imams used their position to amplify the conflict by actively provoking local Muslims to punish the accused (and their communities) themselves, instead of resorting to the law of the state. Depending on the specific context of the situation and the inclinations of the Imam, the course of action chosen may be in the personal interests of the Imam, such as strengthening his religious authority and enhancing his legitimacy in the eyes of the public. The Imam may also be driven by his own sense of moral anxiety and desire to achieve purity. Whatever the individual motivations, the role of the ‘Professional Muslims’, as Sidel calls them, is crucial ‘in stoking the fires of religious tension and providing interpretive frames for the extrapolation of local disputes into larger, interreligious issues’ (Sidel 2006, 103). Thus, the Imams play the role of ‘fire-tenders’ in galvanising the crowds (Brass 2003b, 33).

In the case of Saleem, the Imam played that role and used the mosque pulpit to deliver sermons riling up the Muslims against the Christians. Daniyal told me that the Imam framed the issue as an eternal war between the Christians and the Muslims. He claimed, ‘the Christians are the same people who threw stones at the Prophet Muhammad, and it is time to finish them now’. There is an advanced level of transvaluation happening here in which the Imam replaces the everyday relationships between the Christians and Muslims living in the same village with imagined identities and broad moral narratives. Through this process of transvaluation, the people who were engaged in everyday interactions with each other ‘end up as particles of a large, homogenized, and organized avalanche’ (Tambiah 1996, 193). This effect is achieved through ‘mytho-historical clarion calls that recall their past, explain their present, promise a rosier future, and justify and exonerate punitive violence’ (ibid.). By calling upon the ‘mytho-historical’ story of the Christians attacking the Prophet Muhammad with stones—establishing a literal imagery of the offence of blasphemy—the Imam presented

the Christians as the aggressors and the Muslims as the victims. Once ‘the subjectivity of experience has been evacuated’ in the construction of imagined identities of self and the symbolic Other, the ‘aggressors can see themselves as if they were victims’ (Das 1998, 109). Seeing themselves as the victims of Christians’ attacks, through attacks on the personality of the Prophet who is central to their Muslim identity, the Muslims justified punitive violence against the whole Christian community.

The Imam and the mosque committee directed the crowd inflamed by punitive passion to torch all Christians’ houses and Church along with Saleem’s house. They agreed upon a time to carry out the torching: post Friday prayers—part of the ‘temporal structure of riots’ (Das 1990, 9). Friday prayers are a symbolic event as well as a ‘strategic checkpoint’ for religious rallies, protests, and even social activism in Pakistan and other Muslim countries (Butt 2016; Sidel 2006). The period following Friday prayers is therefore not an arbitrary time chosen to perform the violence; it has traditional religious and communal significance. The religious significance draws upon the emphasis on Friday prayers in Quranic and Prophetic traditions; the communal significance lies in the fact that it is the biggest regular social gathering for Muslims. Friday also has symbolic significance as the day of purification for Muslims—the religious traditions and local customs recommend washing, cleansing the body, trimming the nails, etc. on Fridays. It is no surprise then that Fridays become the days of symbolic purification of the society as well. In addition to the symbolic significance of Friday, the delay in carrying out the punishment is strategic too, as it gives the clerics and other religious leaders time to recruit the ‘mob’ and reach out to an audience wider than those who attend the local mosque regularly or live in the immediate vicinity. Daniyal, who saw the mob in his village very closely, asserted,

People who were part of the crowd were the lowest (socio-economic) ranks of people. They were lower caste professions like shoe-repairers, barbers, etc. Many of them were not residents of our village. They had joined from the neighbouring villages. The big, influential people—the mosque committee and the Imam of the mosque—incited the crowds and themselves watched the show. They also got the religious organisations involved who riled up the crowds even more. Sunni Tehreek and other Sunni organisations (and political parties) gathered the mob and provided them combustible material.

The religious organisations get involved through their connections with the local religious leaders and Imams. They facilitate further politicisation of the issue and mobilise resources from across various villages and cities. During my fieldwork, I also followed the social media

pages and subscribed to SMS groups of some key religious organisations actively engaged in anti-blasphemy campaigning. The news about incidents of blasphemy accusations is widely spread via social media and mobile phones. Thus, the conflicts escalate from inter-personal incidents of perceived transgressions to meta-issues concerning the Muslim community as a whole. The escalation to this point and the mobilisation of the crowds is brought about by key actors or ‘recruiters’: the clerics and religious organisations who have vested political interests in the issue. Nevertheless, those who join the mob are driven by their own insecurities, fears, frustrations, and passions. The ‘recruiters’ themselves have both emotional *and* political/strategic interests in mobilising crowds against the accused. The violence is pre-planned, and crowds are recruited following certain patterns. At the same time, the experience of *being in the crowd* allows the individuals to transcend their individuality, submerge themselves in the collective identity, and generate ‘unimaginable brutality’ (Kakar 1990, 143).

To Resist or to Flee? Agency in Powerlessness

What does one do when one sees a crowd of angry men ready to attack? The natural response would be to run for one’s life. However, the decision to flee is also embroiled in emotional dilemmas. The news of Muslims’ plans to torch the Christian neighbourhood reached Daniyal and other Christian residents of the village through loyal friends. On the Friday chosen for the torching, a wedding was also scheduled to take place in the Christian neighbourhood. The father of the girl who was to be married, along with four other Christian men, went to see one of the local influential Muslim men a day before Friday. They wanted to seek permission for Sohail Masih’s daughter’s wedding ceremony. The Muslim man said to them, ‘Don’t marry your daughter in this village because we are going to burn your houses tomorrow. If you want to conduct the wedding ceremony, go to a close-by village or do it with no more than ten people here’. He also told them that the Muslims wanted four Christian men to be handed over to them if they wanted to avoid torching—because those four had helped Saleem run away and had assisted his family. Daniyal was one of the four men named.

The Christian men’s delegation came back and warned the whole village. They refused to surrender and hand over the said men. However, in order to escape the consequences, most of the Christians fled the village that day. Daniyal decided to stay back. He described his experience of staying back in face of imminent danger as a spiritual one. For months after the

incident, he reflected on his experience ‘of looking death in the eyes’ and drew his self-worth, amidst all the chaos, from the fact that he resisted. He explained his decision of refusing to flee in these words,

The purpose of the Muslims warning us beforehand was in fact to scare us and make the Christians leave their properties behind and flee the village. On Friday, I told Saleem’s family to go to some safe place and they left. Almost 90% of people moved out of the village. My family also fled. They were worried for me and asked me to go to some safe place, but I refused and told them that I could not leave the village because God, my lord, had given me the power to face this. I also said that if I ran away, then what would happen to our people? I was ready to die for my people. I did not care about my life. Seeing my stubbornness, my parents stayed with me and the rest of the family left. That night, God gave me so much power that I cannot tell you. I could have easily fought off even a thousand men single-handedly. I praise God for this. This is a secret between me and God. God told me not to leave; he told me that if I left, everything would be ruined. I had two guns and seven cartridges with me at my house. I fed the cartridges into the guns and got ready for fight. I resolved that first I would stop the crowd with words and ask them to solve the problem through talk. If they still attacked me, I would fight them.

This is one of the examples that shows how the accused and ones close to them exercise their agency, while making decisions in risky circumstances. Acting in faith was not merely a way of gaining psychological refuge for Daniyal; rather it was his moment of self-actualisation, allowing him the possibility to believe that he had some ‘power’, despite his powerlessness in the given circumstances. In a similar incident, a Christian woman, Sara, who was accused of blasphemy, refused to flee while the crowd of Muslim men was gathering outside her house. In a tone of defiance, she proclaimed, ‘If I had run away, that would have meant I actually committed blasphemy. I was innocent. So, I wanted to stay and tell the truth (at the risk to my life)’. Both Daniyal and Sara had to eventually escape, despite their resolve to stand firm in the face of the threat. However, that brief period of ‘resisting’ allowed them the opportunity to feel that they had some agency in face of the circumstances. As Daniyal relied on his presumed spiritual prowess with the determination to ‘fight’ when he stayed back, it gave him a sense of purpose and meaning long after that episode was over. Mashal Khan also continued to defend his position and kept going to the university after he had been accused and suspended from the university with a warning not to be seen on campus, until the day he was lynched to death by his fellow students. While most of the accused never get a chance to fight back in the face of violence or even truly contest the accusation, they live through the dilemmas of defending themselves or fleeing the threat of violence after the accusations.

Victims and survivors are usually not seen as significant *actors* in the production of collective violence. However, the decisions of the accused in the face of threat can also determine the eventual outcome of the conflict. If Mashal Khan had fled, he could also have been a survivor—even though not all of those who flee survive. There have been cases in which despite an attempt to flee, the accused was followed up, captured, and brought to violent punishment. In fact, attempts to flee further fan the flames and may lead to even more intense forms of punishment. Nevertheless, *it is possible* to escape violent punishment if the accused manage to find appropriate ways to escape and safe places to go to. This is dependent on their resourcefulness. Saleem avoided death at the hands of the violent crowd because he managed to escape in time. I argue that while the accused are the weak actors with the least amount of agency to determine the outcome of the conflict, their decisions may save their lives in some cases. Moreover, regardless of the effective impact of their choices, *the subjective experience of agency* shapes their self-image and self-worth and helps them cope with the adverse consequences of the conflict. As Das suggested, survivors are not passive beings ‘completely controlled and moulded’ by the circumstances outside their control; rather the ‘assault and the threat of annihilation’ bestows ‘a heroic dimension to the task of surviving’ (Das 1990, 31). I would like to extend Das’s concept of ‘heroic dimension’ to the victims as well, those who choose to resist but do not survive.

Constrain or Condone: The Role of Police and Administrative Bodies

Eventually, the Friday prayer time approached. Daniyal’s friend, Kashif—a man who had converted from Christianity to Islam—went to the mosque for the Friday prayers. While he was there, the Imam at the mosque was rousing the passions of the crowd through his sermon and preparing them to attack. Daniyal recalled,

As the mob started gathering after Friday prayers, Kashif told me to contact the police and whomever else I could. I called 15 (police) and the person on duty arrived within a few minutes and controlled the whole situation by dispelling the crowd. The police asked me why I hadn’t called them earlier. I told them that I thought I could handle the situation myself, but I realised at the last moment that I could not.

The police dispersed the crowd by convincing the Muslim leaders to discuss the matter in the presence of the police. In this rare fortunate event, they managed to contain the violence. They formed a peace committee with three representatives from each side (Muslims and Christians). In the presence of the police (heavily deployed in the village for weeks after the

incident), the Muslims calmed down and retreated from their intentions of torching the Christian neighbourhood. However, it must be noted that by the time the mob gathered and Daniyal called the police, an NGO worker whom he had contacted earlier, had spread the news amongst influential activists who got local and international media coverage for the incident and managed to pressure the higher-level police officials to reach the site and control the situation³³. Some human rights activists began spreading the contact details of the senior government and police officers of the relevant district on social media, encouraging people to push them to ensure peace in Daniyal's village. The activists who managed to put this pressure on the police and local administrative officials were also affiliated with powerful politicians, managing to gain the authorities' attention just in time. However, this is not always the case. In many other incidents, police and the administrative bodies failed to contain the violence.

It is widely known that police were informed and were present at the time of the Joseph Colony incident, Mashal Khan lynching, and several other cases, but could not prevent violent action. The role of local government representatives, who have a certain influence over the public in their areas, has also been noted to be mostly unhelpful. Let us consider a specific example of police and government's failure in containing the violence. In December 2016, in a village in Chakwal, the local Muslims orchestrated an attack on an Ahmadi mosque resulting in a few casualties and vandalism of property. A couple of weeks before carrying out the attack, the Muslims posted a letter with 580 signatories to the District Coordination Officer and copied it to several other government representatives, including Ministers and the Prime Minister himself. In the letter, they declared their grievance against the Ahmadis for occupying a mosque in their village and warned that if the government did not take any action against the Ahmadis, they will be compelled to take extreme measures themselves. The

³³ While we see a positive impact of media in this case, in other cases it may be counter-productive. For example, due to their extensive coverage of blasphemy cases, the news reaches more violent masses than would have been possible without such exposure. Asia Bibi's case became highlighted by media to an extent that it led to mass demonstrations at the national level, Muslims from across the country demanding death punishment for her. Similarly, media's coverage had an immense role in making a hero out of Muntaz Qadri for hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis. Moreover, the media coverage of blasphemy cases has also contributed to a rise in number of blasphemy cases across the country. This is because common people who were never aware of the existence of blasphemy laws, now have a convenient tool at their hands if they want to take revenge upon their rivals and redress their personal grievances.

Ahmadi community also wrote to the local administrators seeking protection from the government due to the threats from the Muslim community. Nevertheless, the government representatives failed to respond and deliberately stayed out of the matter. There are various other incidents in which the police and the government officials failed to restrain violence despite prior knowledge and reports. Ian Copland argued that in order to successfully curb collective violence, ‘the state must want to act, and have the will to do so, even at the cost of offending some of its supporters’ (2010, 147). He further contended that ‘modern states clearly have the capacity to contain outbreaks of communal violence. They must also, of course, want to do so’ (ibid., 150). There are several reasons why the police and the local government representatives *do not want to act*.

The interests of the local government representatives lie in maintaining their voter support, and hence they try to avoid getting involved in situations in which the majority is engaged in violence, even when they are not actively condoning violence. Similarly, the police’s ‘reluctance to use force may be an expression of solidarity with those against whom the police or the army is being asked to use force’ (Das 1990, 23). After all, ‘the policemen are part of society’ and may themselves subscribe to the ideas under contestation (ibid., 24). Das pointed out that the state—and its subsidiaries such as police—have their own repertoires of action for managing situations of violent conflict (ibid., 23). The police action may deliberately be delayed so that the crowd can ‘inflict considerable damage before they are brought under control’ (ibid., 24). This is not only because of the police sympathy with the majority but also because the state’s legitimacy is also at stake when using force against the perpetrators of violence.

Thus, while the police and the administrative bodies have the capacity to contain violence, they may instead condone it to gain moral legitimacy or because of their own personal beliefs. They can also choose to deliberately stay out of the conflict to pursue their political interests. Hence, the conflict is not politically neutral, as the actors involved have their political interests at the fore. Turner succinctly pointed out how social dramas are essentially political processes,

Social dramas are in large measure political processes, that is, they involve competition for scarce ends—power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity—by particular means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce—goods, territory,

money, men and women. Ends, means, and resources are caught up in an interdependent feedback process (1980, 152).

The decision of the police and the government representatives to act to control violence or to stay out of the matter is also political. Sometimes it is the political goals of those in the front-lines, and other times it is the political goals of the higher-ups, such as the ministers, who are not physically present at the site of the conflict but who decide the course of action to be taken. Despite the various possible sources of motivation—emotional, political, strategic—the decision of the police and the administrative bodies can determine whether violent action takes place or not.

Lasting Hostilities and Wider Disturbances in the Social Fabric

Despite having reached a peace agreement with the Muslims, Daniyal did not see the situation in the village as peaceful. He continued to interact with various news media. He was interviewed by journalists from Britain, France, and Germany. His proactive role in communicating with the NGOs and the media outlets agitated the local Muslims even more. Due to their growing hostility towards Daniyal, he had to eventually flee the village. He explained,

The Muslims still had grievances against us because there were police in the village. NGOs were visiting every day. The Muslims thought they were being attacked by the Christians. They felt like a bald man whose head is being picked by birds. They started blaming me for the whole situation. They said that I was responsible for the police and the NGOs taking up the issue and coming to our village. Peace has apparently been restored in my village, but the eyes of the Muslims are still waiting for me. They believe that the Christians succeeded due to my efforts and that I gave the whole story to the news agencies. They think that I am the master-mind behind the success of Christians over them. So, the Muslims continue to look for me and Saleem. They were saying they would not spare the two of us. Therefore, even now, I, Saleem, and his family are not safe. We are all living in hiding (separately).

While the conflict had been resolved formally, the grievances were still there and found alternate outlets of expression. The local Muslims—particularly the landowning *Jatt Biradri*—decided to boycott the Christians socially and economically. The village consists of about 3000 houses of Muslim residents and 30 houses belonging to Christians. Muslim residents of the village are economically stronger than the Christians as they own land and have family members in the Gulf and Middle East region sending money back home. Wheat farming is the mainstay of sustenance and economic activity in the village. Working on the

crops of the land owners is the major source of livelihood for most of the Christians who belong to the working class of the village. They get about two hundred rupees (~\$2) per day for working in the landowners' fields. Some Christians are bonded labourers living under conditions of slavery. They serve their Muslim overlords 24 hours a day and get a meagre amount in return for their services. They are 'bonded' to certain families/landowners as labourers in return for the money they or their ancestors may have borrowed from the landlords but could not return. Daniyal lamented the economic dependency of the Christians upon Muslims and the misery that ensued following the boycott in these words,

To be honest, most of us live all our lives indebted to Muslims. We can never pay off the money they may have lent to our previous generations at some point in time. But after this incident, the Muslims stopped hiring us (Christians) for labour on their lands. It was the wheat-harvesting season. They stopped giving us grain (as many of us get our payments in grain). Christian women who worked in Muslim houses (as household help) could not work anymore. So, we had no grain and no money. The Muslims threatened us that if we did not pay their debts back, they would capture our houses as well. We own the houses because they were allocated to us by the government a long time ago. However, the Muslims said they would grab our houses if we failed to pay their charges back. It was impossible because they were not giving work to Christians anymore. There was a primary school in our community but even that has been closed because of this issue.

In the months following the incident, the relations between the Christian and the Muslim communities slowly returned to 'normal'. The school was reopened, the Christians started getting work from the Muslims. However, the rehabilitation of the society after serious episodes of violence, when 'perpetrators, victims, and witnesses come from the same social space' and engage with each other in their everyday life, is almost impossible (Das and Kleinman 2000, 2).

No glib appeal to "our common humanity" can restore the confidence to inhabit each other's lives again. Instead it is by first reformulating their notions of "normality" as a changing norm, much as the experience of a disease changes our expectations of health, that communities can respond to the destruction of trust in their everyday lives (Das and Kleinman 2001, 23).

Healing and rehabilitation, therefore, mean transformation of the society to a different state in which the relationships amongst the people are permanently altered (ibid.). The aggressors reinhabit the same world with an enhanced sense of their moral purity and power. Tambiah noted that the perpetrators of collective violence are not 'burdened with concerns and reactions that impede their return to everyday life' (1996, 230). In fact, engaging in violence

against those deemed transgressors of religion further consolidates their sense of self and morality by helping them achieve ‘purification’, even if they are tried and/or punished by the state’s legal procedures later on. In case of communal violence, having demonstrated their power and superiority against an already weaker and inferior community, the aggressors are further emboldened in their exploitation of the marginalised.

For the survivors, on the other hand, the violence lays bare ‘the artificial order of normal times’ and alters the way they see themselves in relation to the others (Das 1990, 32). For Daniyal and Saleem, the transformation was extreme because they had to permanently relocate and reconstruct their lives in the shadows of constant threat. Once accused of blasphemy, it is practically impossible to get rid of the label and resume normal life in the same circumstances as before, which was the case for Saleem. The case of Daniyal, however, is unusual because he was not the prime accused. Nevertheless, through his defiant actions, he antagonised the Muslims against him in such a way that no peace was possible. Some form of peace could be established with those who conformed to the existing social hierarchies even within the conflict—such as those who went to seek permission for a wedding from the Muslims. Daniyal, however, not only defied the hierarchies but tried to turn them around by bringing the attention of NGOs and international media to the village. Therefore, no peace was possible with him.

It is not only the relationships between the two communities that are permanently altered, but also amongst the members of the same community. Relationships with friends and relatives who refuse to support the accused and their families in the times of crises are also permanently deformed, if not severed. Sara, the young girl accused of blasphemy, told me that her fiancé broke off the engagement with her after the accusation and her relatives stopped visiting them. Most of the accused (survivors) I talked to during my research had similar complaints about their relatives abandoning them in the face of violence. They often expressed how the crisis ‘laid bare the truth of their social relationships’. Thus, the moments of violence reveal not only the true extent of (potential) hatred between the communities that already share uneasy relationships with each other—such as the Christians and Muslims—but also the illusions inherent in relationships of loyalty and solidarity. Through the moments of violence, the victims and survivors also realise to its full extent the indifference and/or prejudice of the state and the administrative bodies against them. Thus, as Veena Das put it, the survivor learns to see ‘how the microcosm of violent space and time that s/he inhabits is a

reflection of the macrocosm of the violent modern state' (1990, 32-33). The outcome of the conflict, therefore, 'is no clear-cut victory, no definitive crossing over to safety and renewal', but also 'no complete defeat, no ultimate breakdown and dissolution' (Das and Kleinman 2001, 24). The social fabric of the society is permanently affected, 'and yet in the midst of the worst horrors, people continue to live, to survive, and to cope' (ibid., 1). The conflict may come to an end, but violence lives on within the intimacies of everyday interactions and may surface at some other point, in some other form.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated in this chapter how blasphemy accusations escalate from inter-personal accusations of blasphemy to communal outrage and which mechanisms determine the form the punishment will take. I have argued that in cases when violent action takes place, the process of escalation draws upon certain repertoires of action such that legitimization is sought from religious authority rather than the state authority, crowds are mobilized by the local Imams and mosques, and the administrative bodies take sides based on their own strategic interests in the conflict. On the other hand, the accused seek help from their communities, their own religious organisations, NGOs, and other civil society actors—all of whom have their own interests and fears in the situation. Thus, subjective decisions from a number of actors determine the course of action to be taken and the eventual outcome of the conflict.

Following Veena Das's conception, I argue that a certain 'contiguity' has to be established not only between the specific issues and the collective symbols, but also between the decisions taken by various actors at different stages of the conflict for the violence to take place. Thus, the occurrence of collective violence following blasphemy accusations is not inevitable—it is within the power of the key actors, such as the religious leaders and Imams, the police and administrative bodies, and the invisible hand of the higher-ups in the state to quell or contain the potential for violence. However, it is not always the same balance of factors—a set formula—that leads to collective violence in each case. On the contrary, the key drivers, the tipping point, and the most significant players may be different in each case. Therefore, whether an accusation will lead to collective violence is contingent upon the decisions of key actors as well as the specific context of the case. I have further contended in this chapter that collective violence—when it happens—is both organised and meaningful. It is both pre-meditated (as Paul Brass argued) and emotionally significant (as Blom and Jaoul

proposed). Collective violence is organised and planned by the key actors and also draws upon emotional and symbolic repositories that render the violence meaningful to the perpetrators. In the next chapter I will further discuss the legitimacy and meaning of the violence as an act and as a performance.

Chapter 7 - Legitimate Punishment of Blasphemy: Contestation Between the State Legal System and Popular Justice

On 31 October 2018, the Supreme Court of Pakistan passed its landmark judgement in the case of Asia Bibi—a Christian woman accused of blasphemy who had been on death row, in solitary confinement, since 2010 (Hashim 2018). The top court of Pakistan acquitted Bibi, but the decision led to widespread protests around the country and the threat of violence by thousands who did not accept the Supreme Court's decision (ibid.). The protest organisers—senior leadership of TLP—demanded that the three Supreme Court judges who had acquitted Bibi be killed, along with Bibi herself. The protestors blocked key roads in major cities, causing schools and offices to shut down for two days. The government finally reached an agreement with the protestors, promising them that the Supreme Court decision would be reviewed and that legal measures would be taken to put Asia Bibi's name on the exit control list (ECL) to prevent her from leaving the country (Bilal 2018). Through public demonstrations and threats of violence, the protestors made it clear that they did not accept the Supreme Court's decision. They wanted Bibi to be hanged by the state, but the state's legal system failed them by not delivering the desired punishment. The Supreme Court's decision was, therefore, not legitimate in the eyes of the protestors as it clashed with their ideals of justice and legitimate punishment of perceived blasphemers.

Earlier, in 2011, Salman Taseer (then Governor of Punjab) and Shahbaz Bhatti (then Federal Minister of Minority Affairs), were assassinated for publicly lending their support to Asia Bibi (*Dawn News* 2011a). Taseer, accused of blasphemy for supporting an alleged blasphemer, was killed by his official bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri, who has since been revered as a hero by his supporters (Nasir 2016). Qadri was sentenced to death for murder and was hanged in 2016 (ibid.). His funeral was attended by tens of thousands of his devotees—again a clear message that the court's decision to punish Qadri was not accepted as legitimate. In 2016, I talked to one of the devotees of Mumtaz Qadri who was present during the final hearing of Qadri's appeal by the Supreme Court. He exclaimed,

I was sitting there in the court, on a front bench, as the judge sentenced Mumtaz Qadri (may blessings of Allah be upon him). The judges are misguided to think that they can use the law of this country—the Islamic Republic of Pakistan—to go against Islam. It is not the law that decides who is right. In this case, the law was definitely on the

wrong side as it sentenced Mumtaz Qadri, the lover of the Prophet, to death. Qadri only ascended in his spiritual rank as he embraced martyrdom eventually. It is the law that has lost here by not upholding the sovereignty of Allah's commands. Such a sad state our country has come to despite being an Islamic state!

This statement unequivocally contests the legitimacy of the state's legal system and points to a higher system of legality and legitimacy based on the sovereignty of Allah's commands. The disapproval of the two key Supreme Court decisions related to punishment of blasphemy—Asia Bibi vs the State (2018) and Mumtaz Qadri vs the State (2015)—indicates that the state laws are not the ultimate sources of legitimacy and authority that determine the appropriate punishment of blasphemy in the eyes of the people. In the case of Asia Bibi, the protestors were demanding that *the state* should hang Asia Bibi. In the case of Mumtaz Qadri, his supporters approved the *non-state* killing of the alleged blasphemer. Thus, the *legitimate punishment of blasphemy* in Pakistan can be carried out by the state or by the non-state actors but only as long as it conforms to the perceived sovereignty of Allah's commands. The perceived sovereignty of Allah's commands corresponds to the competing ideas of the state of Pakistan, as already discussed in this thesis. However, there is no consensus on the ideal state of Pakistan, and by corollary no unanimous agreement on the sovereign will of Allah. The legitimacy of the appropriate punishment of blasphemy is therefore continually contested between the state and non-state actors.

In the introduction to this thesis I argued against the law-centric approaches to understanding the issue of blasphemy and suggested the framework of legal pluralism instead. Legal pluralism is the theory that societies may have multiple coexisting, overlapping, or clashing systems of legality based on different notions of morality, authority, and legitimacy (Benda-Beckmann 2009; Fitzpatrick 1983; Griffiths 1986). Following this conception, I argue that the *legitimate punishment* of those accused of blasphemy is based on multiple sources of legality and legitimacy, mainly the state's legal system and the wider narratives of popular justice. Both of these sources draw upon Islamic law and dominant religious discourse concerning blasphemy (discussed in Chapter 4). The state's legal system claims to represent the Islamic law, at least with respect to the punishment of blasphemy, and the Western legal framework of positive law at the same time. Popular justice, on the other hand, draws upon Islamic law, glorifying narratives embedded in collective memory, and a local history of the spectacle of public punishment. The two sources of legitimacy, state laws and popular justice, may align with each other in their interpretations of the will of Allah in many cases. On other occasions,

they contest with each other over the interpretation and implementation of the sovereign will of Allah. In instances of clash, the state laws may be totally dismissed by the religious groups for representing the Western law rather than the will of Allah. Nevertheless, in most instances, the state co-opts the ideas of popular justice and the non-state actors co-opt the ideas of the state's legality to establish their respective legitimacies.

There is a range of opinions on the issue of the punishment of blasphemy in Pakistan with various levels of acceptability of the state. Most Pakistanis believe that the state enshrines the appropriate Islamic laws to punish the blasphemers and that they should be implemented. In this chapter, I focus mainly on those who outrightly reject the legitimacy of the state, at least in some cases. When speaking of popular justice, I refer to the discourse of the religious leaders who are the key actors contesting the state's legitimacy and authority. The contestation for the legitimate punishment of blasphemy must be seen as a domain of political competition between the state and the non-state figures of religious authority, each with their own ideas of the 'Islamic state' of Pakistan. I will start with a discussion of the state's claims to legitimacy and the ways in which they are challenged. I will then discuss the popular sources of legitimacy that the non-state claimants of justice draw upon. I argue that while the state's crisis of legitimacy creates space for the ideas of popular justice propagated by non-state figures of religious authority to take hold, the popular narratives concerning the punishment of blasphemy shape the standards against which the state's legitimacy is measured. The ideas of popular justice determine whether or not the state's right to decide on the bodies of the accused will be accepted as legitimate. Hence, it is a vicious cycle in which the state is expected to act in a certain way linked to popular narratives of justice and the state's claim to represent them, but in its failure to do so it cedes more legitimacy to the ideas of non-state justice.

Contesting the State's Monopoly over 'Legitimate' Violence

In this section, I will discuss what gives legitimacy to the state legal system and what takes it away. The claim to represent the Islamic law and the modern legal framework is the key source of legitimacy for the state of Pakistan. However, the legitimacy of the state is challenged on two salient grounds: disagreement with the state's interpretation of the higher will of Allah, and the ineffectiveness of the state in implementing the will of Allah. The

former is a challenge to the state's claim to transcendence and sovereignty as a law-giving entity. The latter is a challenge to the state's ability to uphold and implement its own laws.

What Gives Legitimacy to the State Laws?

The modern state has widely been characterised as the sole arbiter of 'legitimate' use of violence. Max Weber (1946) regarded 'the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' as a defining feature of the modern state (1). René Girard (1977) distinguished between state-violence and non-state violence by calling these public and private vengeance respectively. According to Girard, public vengeance—state's use of violent punishment to avenge an offence through its judicial system—is an exclusive feature of the well-policed modern societies 'which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance' by limiting it to 'a single act of reprisal' (1977, 16). He argues, 'as long as there exists no sovereign and independent body capable of taking the place of the injured party and taking upon itself the responsibility for revenge, the danger of interminable escalation remains' (ibid., 18). In his view, public and private vengeance are the same in principle, but private vengeance is often described as taking 'law' into one's 'own hands' (ibid., 17). According to Girard, what gives public vengeance of the state its legitimacy is its quality of 'transcendence'—that is, being impartial and above the immediate parties. He writes,

As soon as the essential quality of transcendence—religious, humanistic, or whatever—is lost, there are no longer any terms by which to define the legitimate form of violence and to recognize it among the multitude of illicit forms...There are as many legitimate forms of violence as there are men to implement them; legitimacy as a principle no longer exists (ibid., 26).

Thus, the state's monopoly over 'legitimate' violence derives from 'the essential quality of transcendence' attributed to it. The 'transcendence' of the state of Pakistan as a modern state with its claim to monopoly over the right to exercise physical force within its territory is rooted in the Islamic system of social justice, as per the Constitution. The first sentence of the *Preamble* to the Constitution of Pakistan (1973) posits that 'sovereignty over the entire Universe belongs to Almighty Allah alone' and the (representatives of) people of Pakistan are to uphold the 'sacred trust' and 'the limits prescribed by Him' in exercising their authority. The constitution further prescribes that the state is to be run in accordance with the principles of Islamic social justice. The judges appointed by the state also draw upon the Quran and Prophetic traditions in making their decisions. I will analyse the discourse of judges in detail

in the next chapter. Here it suffices to say that the state's legal system, and its right to deliver legitimate punishments to those accused of blasphemy, are embedded within a modern religio-national framework. The transcendence and sovereignty of the state is accepted to some extent as most cases of blasphemy accusations are indeed taken to the state's legal system, as was the case of Asia Bibi. The verdicts of the state's courts of law, however, are not *always* accepted as legitimate. Moreover, as shown in the previous chapters, the accused may be punished by non-state actors without any recourse to the law of the state. Even when the cases are taken to the state's legal system, the accused can be punished privately during the court trials, or after the acquittals. Thus, the state does not have a monopoly over delivering punishments to those accused of blasphemy. The transcendence and sovereignty of the state of Pakistan is, therefore, neither absolute nor universally accepted.

Beyond Transcendence: Multiple Sovereignties

Theories of natural law, such as Girard's conception of transcendence as an essential quality of the state laws, provide a 'founding myth from which the absolute status of law' is derived (Harris 1996, 4). However, when the transcendence of the state laws is not absolute, such as in the case of Pakistan, the state is not the only law-giving entity. In such cases, non-state actors may also hold 'the capacity to suspend both laws and norms and thus create a conceptual ethical zero point from where "the law" can be given' (Hansen 2005, 170). For example, Khadim Hussain Rizvi, the TLP leader heading the protests against the Supreme Court judgement in the case of Asia Bibi, proclaimed in one of his earlier sermons,

We do not believe in any "courts". "Courts" are a western concept. We Muslims have *adaalat* where our Islamic laws are applied, and blasphemers are punished.

Rizvi criticised the English word 'court' and used the equivalent word in Urdu to express his dissent. The criticism of the English word 'court' highlights a deeper sense of disapproval in which the sovereignty of the state and the state's position as the law-giver are challenged. Through this conception, an alternative system of transcendence is established, which draws upon the same religious system of justice as the state but does not acknowledge the state's right to interpret and implement the religious commands. Thus, the religious system transcends and subsumes the modern judicial system but may not be limited to the same. It can be understood as a hierarchy of systems, where the state punishments are considered legitimate as long as they conform to the higher system of transcendence, religious justice,

but this higher system can also legitimise punishments outside the state's legal system. In Hansen and Stepputat's words, a 'de facto sovereignty' is thus created, which grants non-state actors 'the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity' (2006, 296). On the basis of this de facto sovereignty, the Supreme Court's decisions are challenged, and alleged blasphemers consequently killed without reprisal outside the state's courts of law.

The existence of de facto sovereign powers, along with the formal state, is not exclusive to Pakistan. Blom-Hansen and Stepputat (2006) argued that the roots of fragmented sovereignties lie in the colonial past of the postcolonial states. They write,

A key feature of the colonial world was that different kinds and registers of sovereignty coexisted and over-lapped. Most modern states claim effective legal sovereignty over a territory and its population in the name of the nation and the popular will. Although this is always an unattainable ideal, it is particularly tenuous in many post-colonial societies in which sovereign power was historically fragmented and distributed among many, mostly informal but effective, forms of local authority (297).

In Pakistan, religious leaders are usually the local authority who assume the role of a de facto sovereign power in legitimising violence against those accused of blasphemy. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how fatwas from religious leaders legitimise violent action against the accused. Sovereignty is, therefore, a 'tentative and always emergent form of authority' that is claimed through performance of violence by the state as well as by the non-state actors (ibid.). Comaroff and Comaroff (2006) have similarly argued that 'postcolonies tend *not* to be organized under a single, vertically integrated sovereignty sustained by a highly centralized state. Rather, they consist in a horizontally woven tapestry of partial sovereignties' (35). It is through these partial sovereignties and dispersed religious authority (recall Chapter 4) that the legitimate punishment of blasphemy is contested. With various claimants of sovereignty, including the state, competing against each other it is hard to establish a single source of legitimacy for the punishment of those accused of blasphemy.

Ineffectiveness of the State's Legal System

While the existence of multiple sovereignties and systems of transcendence challenges the state's exclusive position as the law-giver in society, the state's legal system is still the most popular route chosen to punish the blasphemers. In fact, the state is expected to uphold and implement its legal system in accordance with the Islamic law. The state's legitimacy is

therefore also challenged when it fails to function efficiently and effectively to punish the blasphemers according to the people's ideas of justice. One of the most common arguments made by my research participants who supported punishing the blasphemers outside the state's law was related to the 'ineffectiveness of the state's legal system'. In this section, I will discuss why and how the state is perceived to be incapable of delivering justice effectively. In order to do so, it is pertinent to understand first how the state's legal proceedings work in cases of blasphemy. For the rest of this section, the terms 'law', 'legal', and 'courts' refer to the state legal system unless otherwise specified. The information regarding the courts and legal procedures is based on my primary fieldwork when no other sources are cited.

As already mentioned, most cases of blasphemy accusations are taken to the state's courts of law. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, police are generally not the first point of contact after the accusations. It is usually the religious leaders of the accusers who determine whether and when a case is to be reported to the police. In many cases, the religious leaders, in collaboration with local influential persons, use the threat of mob violence to get the police to register cases of blasphemy and to arrest the accused. In my discussions with them, the police themselves claimed that they arrest the accused for their (accused's) own safety due to the threat of non-state violence. As per the procedural requirements, introduced by an amendment in the Criminal Procedure Code in 2004 to prevent misuse of anti-blasphemy laws, a case of religious offence cannot be registered without investigation by a police officer of at least the Superintendent level. However, as several people including police and lawyers told me, the procedural requirements are rarely implemented in practice, as the pressure from the local religious leaders and their supporters does not allow proper and impartial investigation.

Once the first information report (FIR) has been registered upon the application of the complainants, who in some cases are the religious leaders themselves who take over the cases from the accusers to emphasise their own piety and authority, a police report is prepared. The police report includes evidence: statements of the accusers, witnesses and the accused. The evidence usually consists of verbal testimonies of the accusers and the witnesses. In some cases, physical objects such as desecrated copies of religious books, etc. are also collected. As far as the statement of the accused is concerned, it is often a *confession* of the offence that is used to claim the merit of the complaint and to initiate formal court proceedings against the accused. A curious phenomenon is the common discrepancy between the initial statements of

the accused as a confession in front of the police officers and their later statements in front of the courts where they deny having committed the crime. This is because, initially, due to lack of legal counsel, the accused are not aware of the legal implications of confessing and in their desperate attempts to escape prosecution confess and ask for forgiveness, or they are forced into confessing the offence. Nevertheless, once the police report (usually referred to as Challan form) has been prepared, it is taken to the Sessions Court. In the Sessions Court, a charge-sheet is framed based on the police report and the accused is notified and given time to respond to the accusations.

As per the Pakistan Penal Code, blasphemy is an offence against the state, even though it is usually reported by private complainants. Hence, there is always a state prosecution lawyer. The accused/defendants are also entitled to state-lawyers; however, due to pressure from the religious groups, accusers, and the community of lawyers themselves, the lawyers are often scared of representing the accused. It is even harder for the accused to appoint private lawyers due to threats and intimidation of anyone who dares to represent a person accused of blasphemy in the court. There have been incidents in which the defence lawyers of the accused have been openly threatened in court rooms, and even murdered for representing the accused (*BBC News* 2014). The accusers, on the other hand, are supported voluntarily and free of charge by many influential lawyers who claim to be doing so for the sake of the love of the Prophet. I will discuss one major group of these lawyers in detail in the next chapter. It is sufficient to note here that from the very beginning of the legal proceedings, there is a power imbalance between the accused and the accusers, already tipping the judicial system in the favour of the accusers.

Once the trial begins, it usually takes several years for the Sessions Court to decide on a case. Nadeem, a young Christian man, was accused of blasphemy in 2013 for allegedly having desecrated a religious book. He was arrested following threats of violence from the accuser, his religious leaders, and the crowd they had managed to gather. A complaint was registered against him under sections 295 A and C of the Pakistan Penal Code. Three years later (in 2016), when I met Nadeem, the court still had not recorded his statement. Nadeem's brother, who was the primary relative following up on his case, told me that he (the brother) had been coming to the court hearings every second week since 2013. He said that he could not find work since Nadeem's accusation and arrest, due to stigma attached to the family of a 'blasphemer'. Moreover, the fact that he had to take time off every other week to visit

Nadeem in jail and attend the court hearings meant that the employers were not interested in hiring him. Nadeem's brother and mother—the only members of the family besides Nadeem—had already been forced out of their house and neighbourhood where they lived due to threats of violence following the accusation of blasphemy against Nadeem. They moved in with some relatives and lived as dependents, which Nadeem's brother found quite humiliating yet unavoidable. Nadeem's lawyer had applied for his bail, but the proceedings of the court were so slow. It was not until early 2017 towards the end of my fieldwork that Nadeem finally received the bail. When I met his lawyer after the bail, he told me that they were facing two major challenges: first, finding a safe place for Nadeem to stay, and second, breaking to him the news of his mother's demise a few months ago. Nevertheless, they were gleefully celebrating the 'success' because in most other cases bail is unlikely for those accused of blasphemy while the trials go on for years.

One major reason for the delay is the generally slow legal proceedings in Pakistan and massive backlogs of cases to be heard. According to a recent report by the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, over 1.8 million cases were pending in the courts of Pakistan at the end of January 2019 (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan 2019)³⁴. The report includes statistics from the Supreme Court, High Courts and District Courts of Pakistan. Many of these cases have been pending for decades. One of the common causes of delay in the legal proceedings is the insufficient human resources in the judicial system, and the situation is compounded by frequent strikes by lawyers (an average of 4-5 working days every month during my fieldwork) and absence of the judges. Within this context of an extremely slow judicial process in Pakistan, blasphemy cases are no exception. However, there are various additional factors that contribute to even longer delays in the cases of blasphemy.

I attended Sessions Courts for a few months, following cases of blasphemy under trial. In most of the cases I followed, the complainants and the witnesses did not appear for the court hearings. After a few weeks of observations, I asked the prosecution lawyers (private lawyers prosecuting cases of blasphemy voluntarily) about the absence of the complainants. They hesitantly explained to me, rather disappointedly, that the complainants register cases due to

³⁴ These numbers are for all legal cases (not just the blasphemy cases), and are updated fortnightly at: <http://ljcp.gov.pk/nljcp/home#1>

their anger at the time of the incident, but then get busy in their lives and do not pursue the cases, which shows ‘their shaky faith and weak resolve to punish the blasphemers’. They did not drop the cases either, ensuring prolonged suffering for the accused who stay imprisoned during their trials, sometimes even for decades. Further delay is caused in cases of blasphemy by judges and lawyers leaving cases due to threats. In effect, the accused spend years going through trials at the Sessions Court.

Eventually, when the Sessions Court judges decide the cases, they mostly convict the accused and award harsh sentences, including the death penalty. Surprisingly, many of the decisions of the lower courts in the cases of blasphemy are reversed by higher courts after appeals, which also take years to be processed (Amnesty International 2016, 13). The number of accused acquitted by the higher courts after appealing their sentences from the lower courts is significant as it shows the different dynamics of threat and pressure operating at the two levels. The Sessions Court judges are more easily intimidated and threatened leading to decisions in favour of the accusers. The judges of higher courts usually have more power and security at their disposal and thus can afford to acquit the accused. However, this does not mean that the higher court judges are not threatened or punished for deciding in the favour of the accused. There have been incidents in which even the higher court judges were attacked or had to flee for their lives after deciding in favour of the accused (DW 2011; Walsh 2011). The recent public wrath against the Supreme Court judges in the case of Asia Bibi is another example of the pressure under which the judges operate.

Thus, initiation of legal action ensures at least several years in prisons while the accused go through trials and wait for the court decisions. Regardless of whether the court convicts and punishes them or acquits them, the initiation of legal action itself is effective in putting an end to the normal life of the accused. Even if—and when—they are acquitted, they cannot resume their pre-accusation lives. In most instances, they have to live the rest of their lives in hiding, adopting fake identities. Very few of the accused are able to escape this fate by fleeing to another country. Hence, even if the accused escape death at the hands of the mob and at the gallows, they are effectively denied a normal existence and social life. Nor does the acquittal absolve them of the label of a blasphemer. There have been several incidents in which those acquitted were killed after their acquittal because they could never be absolved of the offence they had committed *in the eyes of the people*. The legal action against the accused, therefore, causes them to suffer in many ways regardless of whether they are proven guilty or innocent.

They suffer due to the power imbalance between the two parties from the beginning of the proceedings, the long delays in court decisions and their life prospects after the decisions.

All of this suffering, however, does not count as the effective punishment for their crime. Recall that none of those sentenced to death for blasphemy has been executed by the state so far. Thus, the legal action is deemed ineffective in bringing the accused to justice in the eyes of the accusers and their supporters. Many of the people I talked to, including the lawyers representing the accusers, argued that people were forced to ‘take the law into their own hands’ because the state’s legal system was not effective in delivering desired punishments to the accused. This argument reflects a much wider pattern of justifications given by proponents of non-state justice in other places and contexts. Berg and Wendt (2011) contended in their study of vigilantism and mob violence across the globe,

The justifications for popular justice sound strikingly uniform across cultures, namely that the people must take the law into their own hands because legal institutions are either non-existent or too weak. Some apologists argue that the laws are not tough enough to deter criminals; others believe that the punishments prescribed by the law are inadequate to satisfy the popular desire for swift and harsh retribution (14).

While the state laws in Pakistan promise harsh punishments, typically the death sentence, for the blasphemers, they do not implement these punishments in line with the people’s expectations. Hence, the state laws fail to provide the imagined ‘swift and harsh retribution’ according to the proponents of non-state punishments of blasphemers. The state’s legal system is therefore deemed *ineffective* in delivering desired justice. Berg and Wendt also demonstrated that by complaining about the ineffectiveness of the legal system, the proponents of popular justice principally challenge the ‘modern state’s efforts to monopolize criminal justice and to institute an “abstract, rational, detached, and antiseptic legal process”’ (2011, 7). They further argued that the prevalence of non-state punishments in a society questions the state’s claim to monopoly over legitimate violence, denies ‘the popular acceptance of this claim’, and demonstrates lack of faith in the state’s capability to enforce its laws effectively (ibid., 14). Similarly, in the case of the punishment of blasphemers in Pakistan, the state’s claim to transcendence and sovereignty and the state’s ability to implement its laws effectively are questioned simultaneously. The state’s legitimacy is thus challenged on the grounds of its incorrect *interpretation* as well as its ineffective *implementation* of the sovereign will of Allah.

The ineffective implementation of the state laws is also attributed to the malice of the westernised elite of Pakistan who control the state and the judiciary and represent Western interests rather than the will of Allah. Otunnu (2016) identified rule by economic and political elites and chronic dependence on other states and international regimes as some of the characteristics of states that are undergoing a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ (ibid., 17-18). These characteristics of states lacking legitimacy are relevant to the case of Pakistan as well. In 2016, during my fieldwork, several of my research participants expressed their angst at the fact that the state was ‘so swift in hanging Mumtaz Qadri but had delayed hanging Asia Bibi for years’. For them, the failure to hang Asia Bibi demonstrated the state’s unwillingness to do so, which they attributed to the ‘influence of the Western powers.’ In 2018, when the Supreme Court acquitted Asia Bibi, the protestors rejected the decision claiming that it was a result of corruption of the judges and the government who were colluding with the Western governments and NGOs to undermine Islam. The acquittal of Asia Bibi was perceived by the protestors to be an attempt by the government to appease the Western states to gain their favours as Pakistan was going through an economic crisis at the time. Even when the state’s actions cannot be linked to immediate economic and political interests that may force them to go against the perceived ‘will of Allah’, the ruling elite of Pakistan is seen as a representation of corrupt and un-Islamic values. The erosion of the legitimacy of the state of Pakistan is therefore aided by the fact that the ruling elite are seen as westernised and serving the interests of the western governments and other entities who seek to undermine Islam. The state of Pakistan’s ‘crisis of legitimacy’ is thus cumulative as it derives from the state’s lack of absolute sovereignty, its perceived ineffectiveness in delivering justice, and its corruption through representing the interests of Western powers rather than the will of Allah.

Popular Justice: Legitimacy of the Non-State Violent Punishment of Blasphemers

Thurston (2011) noted that ‘communities try to erect and operate alternate means of judgement’ when they sense that the legal mechanisms are failing them (80). Along the similar lines, Otunnu (2016) argued that states that are going through crises of legitimacy are more prone to non-state political violence (1). The state of Pakistan’s crisis of legitimacy lends space to the development of ‘alternate means of judgement’ and ‘political violence’ by non-state actors when it comes to the punishment of blasphemy. Having discussed the

grounds on which the state's monopoly over 'legitimate violence' is challenged, I will now discuss the ways in which legitimacy of the non-state punishment of blasphemers is established. There are various sources that lend legitimacy to the non-state violent punishments of blasphemy. The dominant religious discourse, as discussed in chapter 4, is one of the major sources that establishes the act of killing a blasphemer as an expression of a true Muslim's love for the Prophet. In this section, I will discuss popular narratives that glorify individuals who have done so in the past. Drawing upon the collective memory of past events and imbuing it with religious symbolism, these narratives construct models of desired action and appropriate ways of dealing with a blasphemer. I will further discuss how the spectacle of public punishments lends legitimacy to acts of collective violence against the accused. It must be kept in mind that the sources of legitimacy—popular narratives that glorify acts of private vengeance as well as the symbolic power of the spectacle of collective punishment—reinforce each other and are components of the same 'violent imaginaries' (Schröder and Schmidt 2001, 9). It is within these violent imaginaries that 'swift and harsh' punishment of the alleged blasphemers is imagined and carried out (Berg and Wendt 2011, 14).

Constructing Heroes through Glorifying Narratives

In an Urdu book titled *Shaheedan-e-Namoos-e-Risaalat* (Martyrs of the Honour of the Prophet), the editor Muhammad Mateen Khalid has put together a number of essays about eighteen heroes. The essays are short biographies, discussing the lives, character, personalities, and heroic deeds of the said martyrs. All eighteen of them are considered heroes of Islam because they killed alleged blasphemers and were themselves executed by the state of their time for murder. Hence, they are believed to have offered their lives to the cause of defending the honour of the Prophet Muhammad.

The first personality in this roll of honour is Ghazi Ilmuddin, who is one of the most legendary lovers of the Prophet Muhammad for the present-day Muslims in Pakistan. He was a young Muslim man (21 years old) in 1929 when he assassinated the Hindu publisher Mahashe Rajpal who had allegedly published a book containing insulting remarks about the Prophet Muhammad. He was later hanged for murder under the British government in 1931. Since then he has been revered by the Muslims of the sub-continent for his display of true love for the Prophet. The discussions of the honour of the Prophet and blasphemy frequently

involve a reference to his personality. Ilmuddin's name itself symbolises the pinnacle of love and passion for the Prophet Muhammad. In a dedicated biography of Ilmuddin, the author writes,

Ghazi Ilmuddin was only a year old and his mother was nursing him when a beggar knocked at the door. She carried baby Ilmuddin to the door and opened it. She saw the beggar standing there and gave him some money. When she was about to close the door, the beggar glanced at the baby in her lap. The beggar addressed the mother and said, "He is a lucky child and will bring a lot of fame to his parents". He further said, "Allah has blessed you with a special gift in the form of this child. Look after him and always dress him in green" (Mateen, 2007, 22-23).

Green is a colour associated with the Prophet Muhammad, as the dome of his mosque in Medina is painted in green. In the story narrated above, the author is hinting at the special spiritual characteristics of Ilmuddin by birth. It is implied that he was chosen to be a successful lover of the Prophet Muhammad. There are many other stories that similarly exalt and glorify the person who carried out punishment of an alleged blasphemer even though the person in question was not well known before the act he committed. Thus, it is in the narration of the act, and association of glorifying narratives with the person who committed the act that the public acceptance of the punishment is established. These glorifying narratives are a powerful source of legitimacy for not only the specific instance of punishment of a blasphemer under consideration but all future such events as well.

Ilmuddin is not only revered by a marginalised or fringe sections of the society. He was praised by Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the national poet and visionary of Pakistan. He was defended in the British court by Jinnah—some people believe, for free—who also put his weight behind the non-state punishment of Rajpal carried out by Ilmuddin. Thus, the founder of the nation, and the most respected heroes of the nation supported Ilmuddin (Rumi 2018). More recently, on 15 January 2018, then Chief Minister of Punjab, Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, named a newly constructed block of a public hospital after Ilmuddin, calling it 'Ghazi Ilmuddin Shaheed Block' (*Pakistan Today* 2018). Thus, Ilmuddin is widely accepted as a hero for the nation, Pakistanis and Muslims.

There is abundance of literature glorifying Ilmuddin and even movies made by Pakistan's mainstream film industry that were not censored. These films depict explicit scenes of killing

of Rajpal by Ilmuddin. The literature and films portray a narrative of Ilmuddin's life attributing spiritual powers and saintly characteristics to him³⁵. Ilmuddin's shrine lies in Lahore and an annual *urs* is arranged at the shrine. *Urs* is a Sufi concept which means the union of the lover (human) with the beloved (God). The death of a *Sufi* is not lamented because it is a spiritual union and is to be celebrated. The caretaker of Ilmuddin's shrine in Lahore said in an interview,

Ghazi Ilmuddin taught the whole humanity a lesson that no one should mock others' religions. He made himself an example for the followers of Islam throughout the world by demonstrating that every devoted follower has the responsibility of protecting their religion. One should not fear death when it comes to fighting for the honour of the Prophet because that fight is for Islam, and if one dies while fighting for Islam then he becomes a Ghazi, and Ghazis have a very high place in *Jannat* (heaven); it is the greatest gift one could receive from God.

While Ilmuddin is the most widely known 'martyr' and 'Ghazi' of the 'honour of the Prophet', there are many others like him. At present, Mumtaz Qadri is the most celebrated lover of the Prophet who delivered punishment to an alleged blasphemer and was himself punished by death. His personality has also been enormously glorified. Even before he was hanged, a book was published by the religious leader from the mosque he used to regularly attend. In his statement in the court, Qadri declared that he had made up his mind to kill Taseer after attending one of the sermons at that mosque by the religious leader and author of the book, Hanif Qureshi. In the book, Qureshi recounts a 'miracle' that Mumtaz Qadri's father told him about. The miracle took place a couple of years before Qadri was born. Qureshi quotes Qadri's father as saying:

We had a dedicated corner for prayer in our house where a prayer mat was always laid. I used to get up in the middle of the night to pray. One night, as I woke up for my prayer and reached that corner of the house, I saw a *Naurani shaksiyat* (a spiritual being made of light), dressed in white, praying on the prayer mat. I saw him finish his prayer and silently move towards the door. Before leaving, he told me: In the southern corner of this house, a friend of God will be born who will raise the flag of Islam's honour in the whole world and make you proud. Qadri was born two years later. I kept that spiritual encounter a secret until the day Qadri fulfilled his spiritual duty by killing the governor (Qureshi 2012, 36-37).

³⁵It was common for Muslims to turn offenders executed by the state during the British rule into saints and heroes. C. Anderson (2015) wrote about this as a reason behind why in some states the British judges preferred imprisonment and transfer to other colonies as punishment over execution.

Once Qadri was executed, there were more spiritual stories associated with him. A few days after his funeral, a religious scholar claimed that he went to Qadri's grave and saw Qadri's hand emerge from the grave with a sword in it. Qadri now has a shrine near Islamabad where his devotees go to offer prayers. While the killers who are still alive are also highly honoured by their supporters, it is after they die for the cause and become 'martyrs' that their spiritual journey is seen as complete and their status as saintly figures fully realised. Thus, the killers of alleged blasphemers are glorified themselves and shape the narratives of the ideal punishment for a blasphemer at the same time. In the interpretation and representation of the punishment, heroes and legends are constructed, and more material is generated for the legitimization of future punishment of blasphemers.

Historicity plays a major role in legitimization of violence; the present violence is justified against past violence and generates symbolic value for future violent action (Schröder and Schmidt 2001, 9). Experiences of violence imbued with cultural meanings are stored in 'society's collective memory' or 'social memory' and are an important resource to draw upon in legitimization of future violence (ibid., 8-9). While drawing upon the glories of the past heroes provides meaning for the current situations, the heroes who are created in the contemporary acts of violence become symbolic icons for future reference. They contribute to the construction of 'violent imaginaries' in which future acts of violence are imagined before they are performed (ibid.). Thus, through representational strategies such as narratives, performances and inscriptions, the legitimacy of non-state punishments of alleged blasphemers is established. However, the narratives that glorify acts of violence do not automatically drive people to imitate those actions. At an individual level, the glorifying narratives and the wider religious discourse are interpreted and acted upon differently by different people. One of the supporters of Mumtaz Qadri, quoted earlier as well, described to me his experience of attending the hearing of Qadri's appeal in the supreme court of Pakistan in these words,

I was angry and wanted to throw my shoe at the judge's face, but I couldn't. I was not Mumtaz Qadri who killed a blasphemer without any second thoughts, even though I am a Muslim and love the Prophet Muhammad. Mumtaz Qadri did what only chosen Muslims can do upon hearing of blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

He acknowledged that while he saw Mumtaz Qadri as a hero for killing a blasphemer and embracing martyrdom, he could not himself do that. He saw it as a weakness of his own faith

but proclaimed that in principle he supported the non-state punishment of blasphemers. Similarly, most people who believe in the glorifying narratives are inspired to different extents. For many, participating in collective violence rather than individual acts of heroism is an acceptable form of action. Nevertheless, the narratives that glorify non-state violence against the blasphemers are a key source of legitimacy drawn upon when such incidents do happen.

Staging Legitimacy: The Spectacle of Public Punishments

The instances in which individuals carry out punishment of blasphemers seldom take place in public. It is often *after* the act of killing that the killers claim the motivation behind their act to be the love of the Prophet, and from then on it becomes a public affair in which glorifying narratives are generated. In cases of mob violence, however, the punishment is carried out in public spaces where the act of violence is visible to a large number of people. With the advancement of technology, the visibility is further increased, as videos and images are recorded and circulated, such as in the lynching of Mashal Khan. The public visibility, or spectacle, of such punishments is another key factor that lends legitimacy to the non-state violence against blasphemers. The spectacle is created by the staging of power, as Schröder and Schmidt argued:

Violence without an audience will still leave people dead but is socially meaningless. Violent acts are efficient because of their staging of power and legitimacy, probably even more so than due to their actual physical results (Schröder and Schmidt 2001, 6).

The power of staging is particularly important when the punishments are delivered by non-state actors. Hence, the qualities of non-state violence that make it effective as a practice include its highly visible and sensual nature which makes it powerful enough to stage an ideological message before a public audience (Riches 1986, 11). Sidel (2006) also argued that violence is ‘performative and representational’ by definition as it seeks ‘recognition in the—imagined—gaze of a broader audience’ (14). Thus, collective violence against blasphemers is a potent means of communication employed by the perpetrators to convey several messages including the ideas of popular justice and their legitimacy. Through public violence, the state’s claims to monopoly over legitimate violence are also contested as the core purpose of violence often stems from contradiction over claims of legitimacy and justice (Krohn-Hansen 1994, 370-1). The ideas of popular justice that regard mob violence or vigilante action as a

legitimate way of punishing the blasphemers are embedded within the specific local historical context of Pakistan.

The vigilante justice is not exclusive to the punishment of those accused of blasphemy, although it has become a lot more frequent in the cases of blasphemy. In 2010, two teenage boys, Mughees and Muneeb, were lynched in Sialkot by a mob, in the presence of police, after being accused of robbery and murder (*Dawn News* 2011b). In 2014, after the terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, there were widespread demands from the public, even the progressive sections of society who condemn mob violence in cases of blasphemy, for public executions of the terrorists (Boone 2014). In response, the government lifted the moratorium on the death penalty, leading to executions of hundreds in the following months to appease the public anger (*BBC News* 2015). In January 2017, several bloggers, activists, and university professors started ‘disappearing’ in what were later revealed to be extra-judicial abductions by intelligence agencies (*BBC News* 2017; Hashim 2017a). A Facebook page called ‘Pakistan Defence’ with over 8 million followers accused the ‘disappeared bloggers’ of having engaged in anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan propaganda (ibid.). The public, at least on social media, was again demanding public punishment of those accused. In January 2018, a seven-year old girl was raped and killed in Kasur, after a series of similar incidents over the past few years in the same town (*Dawn News* 2018). The people were once again furious and called for public execution by lynching, hanging, or burning of the culprits (ibid.). This time, the Senate Standing committee even proposed a bill seeking public hangings of rapists of young children (*Pakistan Today* 2018a). The bill was rejected by the National Assembly (ibid.). However, if the bill had passed, it would not have been the first time in the history of Pakistan that public hangings were practised.

In the 1980s, under the rule of military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, public hangings were carried out and attended by thousands of spectators (Mehdi 2013). The practice was abandoned in 1988 with the return of democratic government. Thus, the idea of public punishment of the offenders is not uncommon or new in Pakistan. There is a long history of public executions (either by the state/rulers or at the hands of the public) in the Indian sub-continent more generally. During the British rule, public hangings and executions by cannon were used to deter and control the citizens (C. Anderson 2015). Prior to that, public executions by elephants were common during the Mughal era (Schimmel 2004, 217; Weiss and Garfield 2017). The public acceptance or legitimacy of the public punishment varied

depending on the wider legitimacy of the rulers, but the visual and performative aspects of the public punishments were normalised.

The relationship between state and non-state public executions requires some attention. There are different levels of legitimacy, legality, and acceptability associated with the two. However, the fact that they are both a *public spectacle* is of significance for the sake of my argument. When people accept and expect the spectacle of public punishments and believe in legitimacy that goes beyond the legality and sovereignty of the state, the non-state public punishments are not an aberration. Thus, while public executions by the state in the past are different from the non-state punishment of blasphemers in contemporary Pakistan, there are certain underlying similarities. Amy Louise Wood (2009), in her book on lynchings in America, illustrates the connection between public executions and non-state public violence. In her appropriately titled chapter, ‘They want to see the thing done’, she argues that while the lynchings of African Americans that began in 1880s were a new phenomenon, they were,

firmly rooted in the traditional social performance of public executions. At public executions, white southerners learned what hanging a person looked like and that watching such a spectacle was socially acceptable. Lynch mobs even appropriated many rituals of public executions—the declarations of guilt, the confessions, the taking of souvenirs and photographs—to confer legitimacy on their extra-legal violence. They saw themselves not as criminals or defilers of the law, as their critics saw them, but as honorable vindicators of justice and popular sovereignty, fulfilling their rights as citizens to punish crimes against their communities (24).

Thus, the two forms of public punishment are inherently similar as far as their performative and symbolic value is concerned. Wood calls it ‘the cultural power of lynching’ that ‘rested on spectacle: the crowds, the rituals and performances, and their sensational representations in narratives, photographs, and films’ (3). Similarly, the spectacle of mob violence against the alleged blasphemers is what makes it a powerful mode of punishment that derives its legitimacy from the history of public punishments and shapes the ideas of popular justice. Together with the glorifying narratives and dominant religious discourse concerning the punishment of blasphemy, the spectacle of punishment sends a message that ‘the community has endorsed the killing’ and that the perpetrators ‘need not fear the sanction attached to killing’ (Tambiah 1996, 278). It is therefore in the communal acceptance of violence—whether it is carried out by the state or by the non-state actors—that its legitimacy is established. Incidents of public violence are also ‘performative representations’ of ‘antagonistic relationships’ (Schröder and Schmidt 2001, 10). The non-state violence against

the blasphemers represents antagonistic relationships between the state and the claimants of religious authority within the society. It is through *public performance of violence* that the state's claim to monopoly over legitimate violence is contested.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that the non-state punishment of blasphemy must be seen as political violence, contesting the state's claims of monopoly over legitimate violence. The contestation for the *legitimate punishment of blasphemy* happens within the wider context of the competing ideas of the Islamic state of Pakistan. The wider religious framework of the state—its claim to be an Islamic state and to represent the will of Allah—is what makes it vulnerable to challenges concerning the correct interpretation and implementation of the Islamic law from within the society. The state's monopoly over exercise of legitimate violence is challenged because it is unable to deliver the ideals of Islamic justice as perceived by certain religious leaders and their followers. It is therefore a contest between the state and the religious authority as to who represents the will of Allah and the Islamic justice system more authentically. The state of Pakistan, therefore, loses legitimacy due to existence of multiple claimants of sovereign authority within the society. In addition to the lack of absolute sovereignty, the failure of state's legal system to effectively deliver desired punishment to the alleged blasphemers, and the perceived westernised outlook of the ruling elite—as well as the state judges—contribute to the crisis of legitimacy of the Pakistani state. Due to the crisis of the state's legitimacy, the proponents of popular narratives glorifying the non-state violent punishment of blasphemers gain legitimacy and establish their authority to decide upon the bodies of the accused. However, it is the ideas of popular justice that shape the standards of legitimacy against which the state's performance is judged in the first place. I argue that it is a vicious cycle in which the narratives of popular justice and the state's crisis of legitimacy mutually constitute and reinforce each other.

Within this system of mutual reinforcement, the state and the non-state actors have to constantly position themselves as legitimate in relation to each other. One way of establishing legitimacy is by placing the blame on the other party such that the state blames the people for 'taking law into their own hands' and the proponents of non-state justice can blame their actions on state's inability to deliver justice (Sundar 2010, 114). Thus, the non-state actors make their claims of legitimacy with reference to the state's legal system. The non-state

punishments do not operate in complete opposition to the state, instead they simultaneously accept and contest the state's legitimacy. Similar trends have been shown in other contexts where vigilante action or non-state punishment demonstrate a desire for inclusion in the state justice system and a willingness to enforce punishments outside the state system at the same time (Goldstein 2003, 33). Vigilantes have also been shown to be 'both antagonistic to the state and co-opted by it; (Smith 2004, 449).

On the other hand, the state also has to engage with the ideas of popular justice dually: by dismissing those who take 'law into their own hands' and by themselves co-opting the popular narratives. Those who represent the state of Pakistan (judges, government and other affiliated entities) have to constantly appeal to the religious discourse and the ideas of popular justice to re-establish and sustain their legitimacy. For example, the day after the acquittal of Asia Bibi, the Chief Justice of Pakistan—Mian Saqib Nisar—made a separate statement in response to the widespread protests against him. He declared,

I and the bench [members] are all lovers of the Prophet (peace be upon him), We are ready to sacrifice ourselves for the Prophet's (PBUH) honour. But we are not judges only for Muslims. If there is no proof against someone, how can we punish them? (Bhatti 2018).

The state judges had to justify their decision with reference to the popular justice rather than the legality of the state's justice system. Similar statements have been made in the past by various others representing the state—including the prime ministers—regardless of which party is in power. While these statements are meant to appeal to the popular sentiments to garner legitimacy for the state, there are also occasions when parts of the state not only appeal to but also believe in and act upon the popular narratives themselves. During my research, I learnt about incidents of the accused getting killed while in police custody by members of police themselves. Other state actors—intelligence agencies with links to military—have also been reportedly engaged in extra-judicial abductions and torture of persons accused of blasphemy (*BBC News* 2017). Thus, it is hard to draw boundaries between the state and the society, and consequently between state and non-state punishments of blasphemers. As Sundar (2010) pointed out:

Vigilantism by definition presupposes a state against whose monopoly over violence (cf. Weber) vigilante violence is measured. However, when practised by dominant groups in society or by a state against whose monopoly over violence (cf. Weber) vigilante violence is measured or by agents of the government itself, it questions the

very contours of the state, making it hazy as to where the power of a legitimately constituted state ends and that of powerful groups in society begins (114).

Similarly, by demonstrating that the state's legitimacy and the ideas of popular justice are not all that distinct and separate from each other, I argue that the 'the very contours of the state' are obscure when it comes to legitimate punishment of blasphemy in Pakistan. In the next chapter, through an analysis of the discourse of lawyers and judges, I will further illustrate how the state and the allegedly *anti-state* elements are not that different; rather, the modern state of Pakistan and the ideas of popular justice are mutually constitutive.

Chapter 8 - At the Nexus of State and Society: Continuities and Discontinuities Between the State's Legal System and Popular Justice

The non-state punishment, or vigilante action, against those accused of blasphemy is usually seen in stark opposition to the state's legal system. However, there are many people who do not see state and non-state punishments as expressions of two distinct systems of justice. Instead, they have a coherent worldview in which both the state and the non-state punishments are simultaneously justified. There are also those who distinguish between the state law and vigilante action, but even in doing so, they co-opt the popular narratives that glorify acts of non-state violence against those accused of blasphemy. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the continuities and discontinuities between the state legal system and popular justice from the points of view of two groups of people who I believe are located at the nexus of the state and civil society. The first group is an organisation of lawyers who voluntarily represent the accusers in the courts to ensure that the state punishes the accused for their alleged offence of blasphemy. These lawyers also represent non-state punishers in the courts, advocating that they should not be held culpable by the state. Therefore, they (the group of lawyers) support both the state and the non-state punishments of alleged blasphemers at the same time. The second group whose discourse I present in this chapter are the state judges deciding on the cases of blasphemy. While the lawyers stand truly at the nexus of state and society as they mediate between the two, the judges officially represent the state but are also a part of the society at the same time. My discussion of the lawyers is based on my ethnographic fieldwork with them over several months, and the discussion of the judges' discourse is based on publicly available court judgements.

In the first section of this chapter I will discuss the discourse of a specific group of lawyers. These lawyers engage with multiple arguments and narratives to construct a coherent worldview in which they simultaneously support state and non-state punishments of the alleged blasphemers. I will discuss the major narratives they engage with, such as reason-based justifications, Sufi ideals of devotion and passionate love in which they actively defy reason, and textual interpretations of religious sources. This section will demonstrate how they believe in multiple sources of legitimacy and strategically construct their arguments in various circumstances. I argue that the multiple and apparently dissonant narratives provide meaning as well as resources for strategic argumentation to the lawyers. I contend that the

lawyers' discourse demonstrates a continuity rather than a dissonance between reason and passion as they construct a coherent worldview in which both state and non-state punishments are justified.

In the second section of this chapter, I will discuss the discourse of state judges. The judges also draw upon multiple sources of legitimacy—the state law and western legal concepts, textual sources of Islamic law, and popular narratives such as the heroic figure of Ghazi Ilmuddin—in constructing their arguments. An analysis of the court judgements will show that the said sources can be used in different ways. For example, religious sources are referred to in judgements both in favour of *and* against the accused. The lower courts—Sessions Courts—usually refer to religious sources (Quran and Hadith) and popular narratives when making decisions *against* the accused. The higher court judges may employ the same sources to reach completely opposite decisions *in favour of* the accused. Hence, the judges exercise discursive reasoning to reach various decisions while drawing upon the same set of sources. Nevertheless, even in the boldest of the judgements in favour of the accused, the judges have to appeal not only to the textual interpretations of religious sources but also to popular narratives concerning non-state punishments. Hence, I suggest the state legal system and popular justice should be seen as extensions of each other rather than two distinct and competing domains. Through an analysis of the discourse of lawyers and judges in this chapter, I argue against the dichotomies of reason/passion and state/non-state in understanding the legitimate punishment of blasphemy in Pakistan.

The Discourse of Lawyers: Reason, Passion, and Strategic Argumentation

Mustafa Chaudhry, a soft-spoken middle-aged man with a short greying beard, wearing a black suit that is a uniform for lawyers, enters Lahore sessions court every morning. Most days he is accompanied by three or four other male lawyers, all in their black suits, and a female lawyer wearing Hijab over a black coat and a white traditional dress. This is his core team but on occasions there may be many more lawyers accompanying him. Sitting on the benches under tin sheds in the concrete yards of the Sessions Court, their day starts with cups of tea. The 'tea boys' highly regard Chaudhry and his team, as do other lawyers passing by who stop to pay their respects to Chaudhry. As they sip tea, they also organise the files for the cases they are to attend that day. Every day, they appear in several cases of blasphemy as volunteer private prosecution lawyers for the complainants. Sometimes, their daily agenda

also includes attending hearings as volunteer defence lawyers for those who have carried out violent punishment of alleged blasphemers outside the state's legal system. They believe they are doing so for the love of the Prophet Muhammad, as is their religious duty. According to them, each and every blasphemer from around the country must be punished harshly, and those who punish the accused outside the state's law are the epitome of passionate love and devotion that a Muslim should have for the Prophet Muhammad.

Headed by Mustafa Chaudhry, Khatm-e-Nabuwwat Lawyers' Forum (KNLF) is an 800-member organisation of lawyers on a dual mission to prosecute all cases of blasphemy across Pakistan and defend those who punish the alleged blasphemers outside the courts. Based in Lahore, the founding members of this forum claim that they are all professional lawyers who offer their services voluntarily for the sake of *Namoos-e-Risaalat* (Honour of the Prophet) in the path of Allah. They have a ladies' wing as well that assists the forum especially with cases of blasphemy in which the accused are women (recall that the officially named 'accusers' are rarely women). The KNLF lawyers claim that whenever there is an incident of blasphemy allegation, anywhere in Pakistan, they visit the place, meet the accusers and the accused, and assist in the prosecution. They assert that they 'conduct proper research' as to whether the offence was actually committed or not before offering their legal assistance to the complainants. However, during five months of my regular interaction with them, I came across many instances in which they decided to support the accusers the moment they heard of the incident, before verifying the details of the case being reported. Nevertheless, up till the end, they maintained their claim that they work without any bias or prejudice against the accused, and that they fight only for the love of Allah and his Prophet. For cases outside Lahore, they assist and support the local lawyers from the relevant areas. Many of those local lawyers are members of the forum too.

Besides the registered members, many other lawyers also join them when they appear before the courts for blasphemy-related trials. KNLF has a communications team that is responsible for circulating messages about time/date/place of blasphemy related trials amongst the lawyers' community. When I asked the president of KNLF, Mustafa Chaudhry, about the purpose of non-member lawyers attending the trials, he said, 'Every Muslim lawyer wants to register his presence in the court of Allah'. It is worth noting that the state's courts of law are referred to as 'court of Allah' by these lawyers but they are not accepted as the *only* courts of Allah. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Khadim Hussain Rizvi—a religious leader—

did not accept the ‘courts’ of the modern state of Pakistan as the places where Islamic justice is delivered. For the KNLF lawyers, however, the courts of the state of Pakistan represent courts of Islamic justice in most cases.

The KNLF members have appeared in hundreds of cases of blasphemy since the 1990s. During the period of my research with them, they appeared in multiple trials for blasphemy related cases (sometimes as many as half a dozen) every single day. I accompanied them to many of these trials and spent the remainder of my time with them either at their Bench in the Lahore Sessions Court or at the personal office of the president, Mustafa Chaudhry. The two most iconic cases they have represented in the Supreme Court of Pakistan are the Asia Bibi vs. State and Mumtaz Qadri vs State. In the former, they supported punishment according to the state law for a woman accused of having insulted the Prophet Muhammad. In the latter, they supported the perpetrator of a non-state punishment (killing) of Salman Taseer who was accused of blasphemy for his criticism of the blasphemy laws of Pakistan. Thus, they support the state and the non-state punishments of alleged blasphemers at the same time.

My first meeting with the KNLF’s founding members was an uneasy one with suspicion and mistrust on both sides. I was afraid that they would disapprove of me and my personal ideas (if they found out) as non-conforming with their religious understanding. I was uncertain of the consequences of such an evaluation from their side. They, on the other hand, were suspicious of my motives. I had Chaudhry’s phone number and called him up to ask for an interview appointment. I told him that I was a PhD student researching blasphemy laws in Pakistan. When I arrived at his small third-floor office in an old, tattered building on a very busy street just behind the Lahore High Court, he and a few other members of his team including the head of the Women’s wing were present there. It was a hot September afternoon and they cheerfully offered me tea/soft drinks. However, before I could start talking to them, they asked me several questions. They asked me about my religion and sect, my ‘school of thought’, the reason I was interested in the blasphemy laws, why I chose it as my research topic, and my take on the issue of blasphemy. I hesitantly answered their questions about my religious and sectarian background. They were somewhat relieved to hear that I was from a Shia family as Shias are considered much closer to the Sunni Barelwis when it comes to reverence of holy personalities and objects—as compared to Sunni Deobandis who criticise both the Sunni Barelwis and Shias for veneration of persons and objects. Nevertheless, I told them that as a researcher I was interested in understanding the view-points of different parties

on the issue of blasphemy and that I had formed no opinions on the matter. Naturally, they were suspicious of me and thus gave very calculated responses to my questions in that first meeting.

It is important to see how the lawyers' answers in the first meeting differ from the opinions that they shared in my later meetings with them, when they had become more comfortable with my presence around them. During the course of my interaction with them, they went from defending the state laws, to arguing that there may be exceptional circumstances in which the punishments can be delivered outside the state's legal system, to presenting the non-state punishers as epitome of devotional and passionate love even in the absence of 'exceptional circumstances'. I will begin by discussing their initial responses in which they defend the state laws concerning the punishment of blasphemy. These responses shed light on how the KNLF members engage in a dialogue with the state's legal framework that claims to embody Islamic law but is embedded in the western legal concepts and structures at the same time. Such an engagement is a persistent concern for them and shapes their ideas and responses in turn. In my first meeting with them, when I asked them about the appropriate punishment for a blasphemer, Chaudhry replied,

When the law is present, we should refer the cases (of insult to Islam and Prophet Muhammad) to the law. The purpose of law in any society is to maintain order. If people get up and start punishing other people on their own, there will be no peace left in the society. Rule of law must always prevail.

He further asserted,

If we did not have the blasphemy laws in place, can you imagine what would have been the fate of all the accused in these cases? The justice would have been served in the streets and neighbourhoods. So, the blasphemy law is indeed a great blessing for the blasphemers. It gives them a chance to clarify themselves in case there has been a misunderstanding or false allegation. In the absence of this law, Ghazi Ilmuddin's law would be implemented. There are so many cases currently being heard in the courts. The trials are going on. These are our courts; we must support them. People should be made aware of the existence of the blasphemy laws and their right usage. The appropriate way is to bring any incident to the court's notice and support it with evidence.

Not only did he justify the need for the blasphemy laws but also praised the procedures required for registering a case, the trial methods, and even the court judgements. After

describing the whole procedure from the instant an accusation is levelled to court judgements, he said,

You see, this is a fool-proof method already in place to prevent the misuse of blasphemy laws. With all the safeguards against false reporting, there is no space left for the misuse of blasphemy laws in the legal procedures.

He emphasised several times that there was no misuse of blasphemy laws and that it was a mere propaganda from the opposing forces that wanted to undermine the laws protecting Islam. He was referring to the state laws and the western legal principles here, in which he and his fellow lawyers had been trained. Nevertheless, this sense of legality (which remained present in their discussions throughout the course of my study) is not the only frame of moral reference they drew upon. They qualified their understanding of law and legality with alternate ideas of legality derived from their religious and personal beliefs. One of the narratives they employed to qualify their understanding of the ‘rule of law’ and legality of the state law was based on the idea of ‘exceptional circumstances’.

Exceptional Circumstances, Ineffective State Laws, and Helpless Victims

Having praised the existing blasphemy laws of the state and after emphasising the importance of the ‘rule of law’, Chaudhry qualified his opinion as follows:

There may be exceptional circumstances when somebody is helpless. For example, let us look at the case of Salman Taseer... There were many applications to register a case against him. Petitions were made, but the court ruled that as a governor he was afforded protection by the Constitution. So, a case could not be registered against him. Both Lahore and Islamabad High Courts dismissed petitions against him. There were protests from religious organisations all across the country. Mumtaz Qadri himself took an application to a police station to register the case. The police reproached him calling him a *Moulvi* (in this instance, used as a derogatory term for a person with beard) and asked him to leave³⁶. Despite all these protests and petitions against him, no apology or statement was issued by the governor or his spokesperson. He not only stood by his (blasphemous) words and (transgressive) actions, he further said on TV that he keeps the *Moulvis* at the tip of his shoe. In such circumstances, there had to be an ultimate reaction. If the government had upheld the law created by the state, there would not have been the need for any Qadri to be born. So, in such a situation, exceptional circumstances have to be taken into account.

³⁶ This story does not exist on the official legal record. Despite being Qadri’s defence lawyer, Chaudhry did not bring it up in his legal arguments in the court.

The ‘exceptional circumstances’ that Chaudhry refers to are imagined in relation to the state’s inability and ineffectiveness in carrying out the desired punishments. Chaudhry explained,

The non-state punishment takes place when people feel that justice will not be served, and the blasphemer will be able to get away with it, as happened in the case of Salman Taseer. If the government had asked Taseer to resign and made him face the charges in the court, this would not have happened. Whenever there is mistrust between a person and the government, such incidents (of non-state punishment) will take place.

Therefore, we see, the emphasis on the authenticity of legal claims (according to the state law) and the ineffectiveness of the existing law, inducing sense of helplessness, go hand in hand. This tension between legality of the law and an extended legality of non-state violence due to ineffectiveness of the state law remained a pertinent theme of my discussions with the members of KNLF. The sense of helplessness in Chaudhry’s account rests on the image of lovers of the Prophet, the true Muslims, as victims due to the ineffectiveness of the law and the government in delivering justice by punishing the alleged blasphemers. It is derived from the feeling of being attacked, since they perceive themselves as peaceful Muslims who are attacked (by a blasphemer) and forced to act in a certain way. One day, while at Mustafa Chaudhry’s office, I met one of his clients, a Sunni Barelwi man. He wanted to register a complaint for the disrespect of the ‘Holy Personages’ against an Ahmadi publisher who had allegedly published disrespectful material against prophets (Muhammad and Jesus) and Imam Hussain (grandson of Prophet Muhammad). In explaining this particular case to me, the KNLF lawyers exclaimed,

These people (the Ahmadis) are very powerful. Due to their influence and contacts, it is very difficult to get a complaint registered against them. Many people have tried to register a FIR (first information report) against them but the police refuse. We have fatwas from religious organisations and orders from some government authorities as well. We even had an order issued from the Lahore High Court that a police case should be registered, despite which no action has been taken by the police so far.

After showing me several documents with orders and fatwas from religious scholars and organisations against the said publisher, they continued,

These people publish such derogatory material that any Muslim who reads it will be severely hurt. There is no way to rectify the hurt. It is as if someone cuts the main artery of an animal and leaves it to bleed, to die a slow and painful death, and does not even offer water. Disrespect of the Prophet is like cutting of our main artery for us. They tie our hands and feet and leave us agonized. In such a situation, if some Muslim

resorts to the desperate measure of killing a blasphemer, the whole world will reproach us for taking the law into our own hands and show us as violent people.

Thus, we can see that the first instance of attack or violence is perceived to be perpetrated by the blasphemer; the reaction of killing the blasphemer is a mere self-defence for the helpless victims of their attacks. These narratives of helplessness and injustice serve as an alternate point of reference for the ideas of legality. Not only this, they also induce sentiments of victimhood that fuel the passion for heroism, that is, the glorification of those who retaliate and are able to deliver punishment to the blasphemers. The more powerful the alleged blasphemer is perceived to be, the higher the reverence accorded to her/his killer. Qadri is not only seen as a killer of an alleged blasphemer, but also as a symbol of resistance to power as it was the Governor of Punjab he took down. He faced a much higher degree of helplessness with the highest of odds stacked against him. The number of people who came out onto the streets at Qadri's funeral, the enormous amount of funds that were collected by the Qadri Foundation after his execution by the state, the construction of a shrine on his grave, the flocking of devotees to his shrine (Pasha 2016) are all signs of reverence bestowed upon a killer of a blasphemer, amplified in accordance with the narrative of helplessness and victimhood.

While the narrative of helplessness and injustice provides the lawyers with a compelling reason-based argument to justify their extended framework of moral legality, it is not the complete story. The explanation of non-state violence as a consequence of 'exceptional circumstances' does not hold true if we look at my later interactions with the lawyers. The KNLF lawyers proudly supported those who punished the blasphemers outside the state law even when there were no exceptional circumstances involved and when the state law was already in action. In such cases, they relied upon the ideas of devotion and passionate love—yet another narrative that they use to construct their arguments. I will now discuss the narrative of devotion, passionate love, and intuitive knowledge that drives the lawyers' judgements.

Devotion, Passionate Love, and Intuitive Knowledge of the Heart

One morning, after a hearing in the Lahore High Court that I attended with the KNLF team, Chaudhry suggested that we go to his office where a lady was waiting for him. The lady was the mother of a 23-year-old boy Ahmed who was sentenced to death in 2012 and was

imprisoned for having killed a man accused of burning the Quran. I accompanied Chaudhry to his office and met this woman and her other son who was accompanying her. She was a thin old woman, in very simple clothes and a white *chaadar* (large piece of cloth for covering head and body); her son was also a very plain village-man. As per their account, one winter night in Ramzan (the Islamic month of fasting) a man burnt a Quran in their village, near a local shrine. The man who burnt the Quran was roughly in his thirties and was a person of 'bad reputation'. He was known to be a thief and used to tease women in the community. He was also a drug addict. When he burnt the Quran at night, there were no witnesses, but later people who lived nearby gathered upon finding a burnt copy of Quran and accused him of having burnt it. Ahmed, about 15 years old and a student of ninth grade at that time, also lived in the same neighbourhood. He was a passionate boy. Upon learning about the incident, he went to the man accused of burning the Quran and asked him why he had done so. The man said, 'Yes, I have burnt the Quran, what can you do now?' Ahmed stabbed him with a knife and killed him on the spot.

After she had told us the story with tears in her eyes, Chaudhry asked Ahmed's mother whether she believed her son had committed the right deed or not. She said that she thought he did the right thing by killing the deceased because the deceased was 'a nuisance to the community anyway'. Chaudhry again asked her, in an assertive tone, whether it was due to the deceased being the blasphemer through burning the Quran that she thought her son's action was right? She said, more thoughtfully this time, 'Of course, burning the Quran was the prime reason and the foremost concern for us is the gracious Prophet'. Chaudhry declared that only if she was happy with and proud of her son's act, would he take up the case and fight for his freedom free of charge. He said to her and her other son that Ahmed is a *Ghazi* (a successful warrior) and that she is lucky to have such a brave, *naik aur kismet wala* (pious and chosen) son. He further said that it was only lucky and blessed people who could get such spiritual opportunities. He reassured Ahmed's agonized mother not to worry and to be thankful for the path (of love) her son had set his foot on.

Ahmed's family is poor and lives in a small village. His father died about fifteen years before. His three brothers work as manual labourers for building and construction works. They do not own any land but have their own house. Chaudhry had written a letter to ask Ahmed's mother and brother to come and visit him in Lahore to appeal Ahmed's death sentence. He paid for their travel to and from Lahore. He had also bought some clothes for women and children (in

various sizes) and gave them to Ahmed's mother. He asked me to open the bag and show the clothes to her and her son before giving them away. Chaudhry proudly told me after this episode that he was fighting for many other *Ghazis* who had killed blasphemers. In Ahmed's case, there were no 'exceptional circumstances' that would have made punishing the accused blasphemer through the state's legal system unachievable. Ahmed acted solely upon his whim and did not try to access the state law in this matter. Nevertheless, Chaudhry not only supported him wholeheartedly, but proactively reached out to his family to provide them his free legal services to save Ahmed from death sentence. He told me that it was through these 'selfless' deeds (of helping the *Ghazis* of Allah and his Prophet), that he hoped to receive salvation and success in the afterlife.

There were many other cases in which the Khatm-e-Nabuwwat lawyers were advocating for *Ghazis* who had committed acts of violence against the alleged blasphemers despite legal action being taken against them by the state. I will discuss in detail one example, that of Yousaf Ali (sentenced to death for blasphemy) and Tariq (on a death row for a murder) who were both in a jail in Lahore. Tariq killed Yousaf in the jail in 2002 and was later acquitted by the court; Chaudhry was his defence lawyer. Tariq has since been revered as a hero, a *Ghazi*, with movies and literature created around his character. This case also highlights how performance of violent action is experienced and construed as well as how it is narrated and glorified (themes already discussed in the previous chapter).

One December afternoon, while sitting with the Khatm-e-Nabuwwat lawyers at their bench in the Sessions Court, Lahore, Chaudhry and his close companion Tahir Sultan started telling me about Tariq. They have a close relationship with Tariq and think of him as a saintly figure. According to them, Tariq was chosen by Allah to perform the very special task of killing the blasphemer and false claimant of prophet-hood, Yousaf, who is popularly called 'Yousaf Kazzab' meaning Yousaf the Liar. Yousaf allegedly claimed to be a Prophet and was sentenced to death by a lower court for his crime in 2000. Chaudhry appeared as the prosecuting lawyer against Yousaf and also defended his murderer, Tariq, in the court. The following account of Yousaf and Tariq highlights how Chaudhry and other members of KNLF support the non-state killings of blasphemers regardless of the legal action taken against them by the state.

According to Chaudhry and his team, Yousaf was a leader of a self-proclaimed religious group and used to preach false beliefs in the name of Islam. He used to lure people into coming to his special room with a promise of *Ziarat* (seeing) of the Prophet and after going through some ritual procedures proclaimed himself as the Prophet. He allegedly played this trick with several people who testified against him in the court as witnesses. He also proclaimed in his sermons that certain verses of Quran were narrated in reference to him. Thus, he allegedly preached false beliefs and was accused of indirectly committing blasphemy by posing as a Prophet. The court sentenced him to death for insulting the Prophet and posing as a Prophet, amongst other charges.

Tariq was in the same prison as Yousaf for charges of murder. Another prisoner, who was Tariq's friend had planned to kill Yousaf, but his plans became suspected and he was shifted to Sahiwal jail. Before leaving, he told Tariq that it was now his duty to carry out the sacred task of killing Yousaf. Chaudhry and his team narrated the incident of that murder to me in the following words,

Tariq had smuggled the gun into the jail through a friend. He had a conversation with the gun while sitting in his prison cell and told it that he had planned to kill a *Gustaakh-e-Rasool* (blasphemer). He begged to the gun, "Please be on my side and support me in this sacred endeavour". After that, the events turned out such that Allah himself provided the perfect opportunity for the act of killing to take place. Yousaf walked past Tariq's cell as he was being shifted to another cell. Right at that time, Tariq was outside his cell for the regular walk that was allowed for 30 minutes every morning and 30 minutes every evening to all the prisoners. When he saw Yousaf coming, he ran back into his cell and brought the gun. He emptied all six bullets into Yousaf's body. Yousaf was a black magician so he tried to ward off the attack by reciting some verses and moving his hand in a particular way (a gesture of magic). However, Allah made even his magic ineffective/void. At the same time, a whirl of wind blew in such a direction that the garbage from the ground started rising up and sticking to Yousaf's body under the pressure of the wind. Yousaf fell on the ground and died. Tariq handed the gun over to the police superintendent, rushed back to his cell and offered prayers of gratitude.

The lawyers emphasised repeatedly that all the events and their sequence was made possible and facilitated by Allah himself. They believe that Allah then favoured Tariq so that he was acquitted by the court despite three cases of murder against him. They insisted that Tariq was not a very pious or practicing Muslim, rather he was chosen by Allah to perform this highly spiritual act. I asked Chaudhry whether I could meet Tariq and other *Ghazis* he had been talking about. A friend of his, a journalist and also a self-proclaimed *Aashiq-e-Rasool* (lover

of the Prophet) who was sitting next to him, asked if I would like to meet Ghazi Qadri too. I was surprised as Qadri had been executed months before this conversation took place. Seeing confusion on my face, he said, ‘Forget it, you won’t understand, these are ideas of *maarifat*’. They all looked at each other and passed secretive smiles. I requested them to explain and upon my insistence they agreed. Chaudhry said, ‘Have you listened to the Qawwali (devotional song), *Oh disdaa meray peer wala werha?*’ (literal meaning: There I see my master’s courtyard). I hadn’t, so he went on to explain:

The Qawwali begins with the story of a man who had been sentenced to death by a king. However, whenever he was taken to the gallows, the rope broke mysteriously, safely landing him onto the ground. After several of these episodes, the king asked him to explain the matter. He smiled and said, “*Yeh meray pir ki karaamat hai* (This is the miracle of my spiritual master)”. When the king demanded to see his spiritual master, he replied that the only way to see his *pir* (spiritual master) was to change positions with him. He said, “Come in my place (on the gallows) and then you will be able to see my *pir*”.

Chaudhry and his journalist friend explained to me that Qadri is a *pir* to them and to be able to see him, one must be at an advanced stage of love called *Maarifat*. They told me that *maarifat* is not for everyone; only *chosen people* get to experience this intense form of love and devotion.

Maarifat, *karamat*, *pir*, and the notion of being *chosen*, are specific concepts within the mystical tradition of Sufism in the South Asian Islam (see e.g., Schimmel 1975; Werbner and Basu 1998). Here I will only briefly describe the meanings associated with these ideas in the Sufi mystic tradition. The Sufis are mystics on a path or journey to the *absolute truth*, that is, God (Schimmel 1975, 130-135). *Ishq* (intense love) and *maarifat* (inner knowledge or gnosis) are described as the last stations on this mystical path (ibid.). First, this form of intense passionate love, *ishq*, has been praised as the highest possible state of a mystic (ibid.). This is because the hearts that love God can have a vision of God. However, such a station of love cannot be achieved without the will of Allah, that is, being chosen by Him. Schimmel describes this as follows:

The mystics felt that the love they experienced was not their own work but was called into existence by God’s activity...God’s love precedes human love. Only when God loves His servant can he love Him, and on the other hand, he cannot refuse to love God, since the initiative comes from God (1975, 138).

Second, gnosis or *maarifat* is the light of certainty gained through intuitive knowledge that is the only possible way of approaching the mystery of love. This is the kind of knowledge that is opposed to the knowledge gained by reason. The Sufi mystics have often shown a disdain for intellect or the knowledge gained by worldly discursive reason, as described by Schimmel in the following words: ‘On the way of love, intellect is like the donkey that carries books; it is a lame ass’ (1975, 140).

The *pir* can thus be any spiritual leader who has been chosen by God to be in love with Him. However, the love of God is not possible without the love of the Prophet Muhammad. The love of Prophet is indeed seen as an essential stage that leads to love of God. It was often termed *Fanaa-Fi-Rasul* (annihilation in the Prophet). Hence, the Prophet is the ultimate spiritual leader or *Pir* as all *pirs* enshrine his love (Schimmel 1975, 211-16). Prophet Muhammad is a centre of devotion for the mystics in Islam as demonstrated by various forms of veneration including poetry, literature and performances. In fact, as Asani, Abdel-Malek, and Schimmel (1995) quoted in their book *Celebrating Muhammad*, no one can estimate the power of Islam as a religion without first considering that at the heart of the tradition is love for the Prophet Muhammad (1).

Understanding the significance of these Sufi concepts and how they are employed in discourse concerning non-state violence against alleged blasphemers highlights the shift between the reason-based and devotion-based discourses. The *ghazis* such as Tariq and Qadri are the chosen ones; they have been picked to love Allah and his Prophet, by being given the opportunity (and spiritual powers) to punish the alleged blasphemers. Their sense of right and wrong is thus not derived from the discursive reason, or the law of the state. The law of the state is merely an instrument to serve the ultimate truth—truth that can only be gained by love and devotion. The source of certainty and knowledge for them is the *maarifat*, the intuitive inner knowledge of the heart. They are also considered *pirs* because they have love of the ultimate *Pir*, that is Prophet Muhammad, in their hearts. The KNLFF lawyers themselves claim to be the lovers of the Prophet and the lovers of those who are at higher stages of loving the Prophet—the *ghazis*.

Another important concept that shapes their personal journeys on the ‘path of love’ is that of being sinners who pin their hopes of salvation to the love of the Prophet in their hearts. As discussed in Chapter 5, most Pakistani Muslims consider themselves as sinful, and in the need

of redemption and purification. In the story of Tariq too, the lawyers told me that he was not a pious, practicing Muslim. Rather, he was a sinner. But they rely upon the mystical conception of the Prophet Muhammad as the intercessor on the doomsday, who will intercede even for the greatest sinners of the Muslim community (Schimmel 1975, 10-11). The lawyers also have a sense of *maarif* as they feel their understanding of the matters of the heart, or their inner knowledge, will be incomprehensible for the outsiders who base their understanding on discursive reason. That is why they did not talk to me of these ideas until much later. The initial responses they gave were more inclined towards the reason-based understanding of law, justice, and exceptional circumstances. This implies that they are themselves conscious of the conflicts and contradictions between the matters of the heart and the matters of the mind that they must deal with every day. However, their reason-based responses also demonstrate an attempt to reconcile the two paradigms. It shows how they want the legal framework of the state to recognise the matters of the heart. The intuitive knowledge or *maarif* is the principle of decision-making for them, in terms of who is right and who is wrong, who should be punished and how, and they want this deeper sense of moral justice to prevail over the law of the state. By advocating against punishing those who carry out punishments of the alleged blasphemers outside the state law, they claim that the intuitive convictions of the heart should be acknowledged within the legal framework of the state.

The Lawyers' Arguments Inside the Courts

So far, I have discussed two major narratives that the lawyers of KNLF employ to justify their support of the non-state violence against the alleged blasphemers. First, they rely upon reason-based arguments in which they blame the ineffectiveness of the state's legal system and exceptional circumstances for the occurrence of non-state violence. Second, at a deeper level, they engage with narratives of devotion and passionate love as higher sources of morality. I also followed them to the trials inside the courtrooms where they used a third set of arguments based on textual interpretations of the Islamic law. They had used some references to the Quran and Hadith outside the courts as well, but they engaged with these sources in a much greater detail inside the court rooms. Hence, inside the courts, they used at least three sets of arguments: reason-based, passion-based, and textual interpretations of religious sources. In terms of the reason-based arguments, they relied upon the concept of 'sudden and grave provocation'—a Western legal concept—to argue that those who kill the

blasphemers outside the state's law should not be held culpable as they acted in self-defence against the attacks by the blasphemers. They further argued that those who punish the blasphemers outside the state's legal system are driven by their devotion and passionate love for the Prophet and hence should be absolved of any charges. Finally, they used references to the Quran and Hadith to make their point and support their arguments through textual interpretations of Islamic law.

Their references to Quranic verses and prophetic traditions demonstrated that Allah and the Prophet Muhammad had not only allowed but also encouraged the individuals who killed those who insulted the Prophet. Most of these references were the same as quoted in Chapter 4 when describing the dominant religious discourse concerning blasphemy in Pakistan. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the lawyers' engagement with the religious sources incorporated both reason and passion. Through discursive reasoning they proved that the non-state punishments of blasphemers are both rational and emotive at the same time, and that both these aspects are valid provisions as per the law of the state as well as the Islamic law. I have argued throughout this thesis against the dichotomy of reason and passion in understanding the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan. The discourse of the KNLf lawyers further demonstrates that reason and passion are not only simultaneously present but also mutually constitutive elements in the popular consciousness concerning the punishment of blasphemy. In the KNLf lawyers' worldview, it is completely reasonable for the passionate lovers of the Prophet to kill the alleged blasphemers outside the state law based on their devotion and the provisions of the Islamic law.

Shifting Narratives of Lawyers: Strategic Argumentation

The discussion so far has shown multiple narratives that the lawyers rely upon to justify their simultaneous support of the state and the non-state punishments of blasphemy. Before moving on, I would like to emphasise that none of these narratives should be seen as either more or less valid than the other. The purpose of discussing these narratives is to highlight the multiple ways in which the lawyers as agents make meaning out of their work and strategically use those meanings to achieve certain ends. In interactions with outsiders (such as researchers like me, journalists and media, etc.) they want to achieve acceptance as both professional lawyers and as good Muslims who love the Prophet. They are uncertain as to whether these people share their devotional worldview or not, so they hesitate to bring up the

narratives of passionate love and intuition. Hence, they are more likely to use the reason-based arguments based on the ineffectiveness of the existing laws of the state which fosters a sense of injustice and helplessness. The narrative of victimhood of Muslims who are facing ‘vile attacks against Islam and their beloved Prophet’ is also more likely to be used in these circumstances as it portrays a clearer *us vs them* picture, establishes the existence of a threat to the society, and justifies the blasphemy related violence as a mechanism of self-defence.

In interactions with each other (the forum members who are also seen as the ‘circle of lovers of the Prophet’), and within the wider community of lawyers, their aim is to project their piety and spirituality as higher than those of other lawyers in order to gain political and social influence (for example, in the law bar associations) and legitimise their cause. Hence, they fall back on Sufi-mystic concepts of love, devotion, and passion when talking to each other. Talking of these ideas also brings them respect within the larger community of lawyers for whom these ideas resonate with their own religious beliefs. In the courts, the aim is to win the argument by bringing in sources that cannot be denied. Therefore, they use references to sources of Islamic law in addition to their reason-based and passion-based arguments. Using the religious texts and sources also asserts a certain pressure on the judges, which is very much an intended effect. Therefore, in addition to western legal concepts, they rely upon religious texts and scholarly works to strengthen not only their arguments but also their position vis-à-vis the opposing parties by posing to side with Allah and his Prophet. It must also be noted that the shift between the narratives also coincides with the shift in the use of language. When talking of the reason-based justifications, such as self-defence, sudden provocation, and other modern/Western legal concepts, the lawyers use English words and terms. However, when talking about the passion-based explanations and mystic ideas of love, devotion, and intuitive knowledge, they usually use Urdu (the national language), and even more so Punjabi (the local language in Lahore). Thus, they do not only shift between different arguments and narratives but between different ontologies when speaking of different explanations for non-state killings of blasphemers.

Nevertheless, these narratives should not be seen as mere means to certain ends; rather they are meaningful and significant in their own right. They are both the motives and the means at the same time. They are actual belief systems and world-views as well as carefully chosen arguments within specific circumstances. In fact, one of the main points I would like to assert through this chapter is the continuity of what seems dissonant and discontinuous on the

surface. The lawyers' discourse indeed presents a continuity and a coherent worldview constructed through various narratives and arguments. They are conscious of some of the contradictions and actively try to reconcile their worldview with the state's legal system. However, the different narratives they use—exceptional circumstances, devotion, and religious law—are all components of a coherent ideology and way of life for them.

The Discourse of Judges: State Laws and Popular Justice

The state judges deciding on the cases of blasphemy also draw upon multiple sources in their official judgements. They refer to modern legal principles and sovereignty of the state as per the constitution, religious sources, and wider popular narratives at the same time. Their references to the sovereignty of the state and the state's constitution distinguish between state and non-state punishments. However, in the same judgements, they may refer to religious sources and other popular narratives that not only allow but glorify non-state punishments of the alleged blasphemers. The judges' discourse also demonstrates that they find some discrepancies between 'the law of the land' and the ideal legality based on religious sources and popular justice. Let us first consider how the judges try to establish the state's monopoly over violence through references to the state laws. I will then discuss how they use religious sources and popular narratives in their judgements through which they transcend the state's legality.

State Laws and the State's Monopoly over Violent Punishment

In the recent Supreme Court judgement on Asia Bibi vs the State (2018), the judges referred to the Constitution of the state as follows:

It is worth mentioning that it is a matter of great pride and satisfaction that we are governed by a written Constitution and Statutory Laws. The Constitution, as per Article 4 thereof mandates that "to enjoy the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with the law is an inalienable right of every citizen, wherever he may be, and of every other person for the time being within Pakistan. In particular (a) no action detrimental to the life, liberty, body, reputation or property of any person shall be taken except in accordance with law (b) no person shall be prevented from or be hindered in doing that which is not prohibited by law; and no person shall be compelled to do that which the law does not require him to do"...Thus, under the authority and command of the Constitution and the Law, it is the duty of the State to ensure that no incident of blasphemy shall take place in the country. In case of the commission of such crime, only the State has the authority to bring the machinery of

law into operation, bringing the accused before a Court of competent jurisdiction for trial in accordance with law. However, it is not for the individuals, or a gathering (mob), to decide as to whether any act falling within the purview of Section 295-C has been committed or not, because as stated earlier, it is the mandate of the Court to make such decision after conducting a fully qualified trial and on the basis of credible evidence brought before it. No such parallel authority could in any circumstances be bestowed upon any individual or a group of persons (13-14).

In the above excerpt, the judges assert the state's authority by arguing that state is the only legitimate deliverer of punishments and non-state actors cannot punish the alleged blasphemers themselves. Similarly, in the case of *Mumtaz Qadri vs the State* (2015), the Supreme Court judges argued the following while rejecting his appeal against his sentence for killing Salman Taseer,

The law of the land does not permit an individual to arrogate unto himself the roles of a complainant, prosecutor, judge and executioner. The appellant was a trained police officer who knew the importance of recourse to the law...If the appellant had suspected Mr. Salman Taseer to have committed the offence of blasphemy, then he should also have adopted the legal course (37-38).

In these examples we see the judges representing the state and trying to establish the authority and legitimacy of the state (and of their own judgements) based on the state's laws. The state laws are thus called upon as a source of legitimacy, but at the same time, they are used by the judges to excuse themselves for making decisions that may not be in line with the ideas of popular justice. For example, in the same judgement in the case of *Mumtaz Qadri vs the State* (2015), the judges provide the following disclaimer:

Without prejudice to the strong religious and philosophical views expressed before us we must state at the outset that we, in terms of our calling and vocation and in accord with the oath of our office, are obligated to decide this case in accordance with the law of the land as it exists and not in accordance with what the law should be (3).

Hence, the state laws are presented as both a source of legitimacy and a limitation imposed on the judges by the state. The apparent rift between the 'law of the land' and 'what the law should be', as mentioned by the judges in the above excerpt, is also a space in which the judges exercise their own discretion in interpreting and alternating the law through discursive reasoning. I will now discuss how the religious discourse and the popular narratives are employed by the judges in their attempts to reconcile the rifts between the state laws and the popular justice, as well as in providing alternate sources of higher legality.

Religious Discourse and Popular Justice

While the KNLF lawyers used the religious sources to establish that the alleged blasphemers must be punished violently (inside or outside the state law), the state judges sometimes use religious sources to counter these arguments and acquit those accused of blasphemy. The lower court judges usually use the religious sources in the same way as the KNLF lawyers do. The higher court judges, however, may take liberties more frequently to offer their own interpretations or alternate religious sources. Nevertheless, the judges' authority to interpret Islamic law is not fully established and universally accepted, as discussed in the previous chapter. Their authority is challenged when they go against the established interpretations of religious sources concerning the punishment of blasphemy based on various factors. These factors include: their westernised outlooks, the fact that they are not 'religious scholars', and the suspicion that they are colluding with the Western powers to undermine Islam. Consequently, the judges have to appeal to the popular sentiments by testifying their own faith and drawing upon narratives of popular justice even when they decide in favour of those accused of blasphemy. In doing so, they not only co-opt the popular narratives and ideals of religiosity, but also give them legal approval. The following discussion will elaborate how religious sources and popular narratives are employed by judges in constructing their arguments and the impact of such argumentation on the overall understanding of justice and punishment concerning blasphemy in Pakistan.

Those accused of blasphemy are rarely acquitted by the trial courts. In the previous chapter, I discussed the impact of external pressure from mobs and religious organisations on the decisions of the Sessions Courts. As a result, most cases of blasphemy are decided in favour of the accusers at these courts. The Sessions judges rely upon religious sources to convict the accused, sometimes despite the lack of convincing evidence to prove the offence. For example, in the case of *State vs Liaqat Ali and Umar Draz* (2009), in which the accused had allegedly denied the existence of Allah, the Sessions judge remarks,

There is no provision in the penal law of the country to take into task the person who used derogatory remarks in respect of the creator of this universe (The Almighty Allah), who is also creator of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). The lawmakers should give attention to this elapse. In this case, both the accused have made remarks more loudly regarding the Almighty Allah rather than the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It chills the marrow of my bones that there is no law to set right such like people (8).

After having noted such a discrepancy in the existing legal injunctions and his own sense of moral legality, he goes on to quote verses from Quran and Hadith for three pages to establish that insulting Allah is indeed an insult to the Prophet Muhammad as well. He writes conclusively,

In the light of above Quranic injunctions as well as from Ayati Mubarka and the prevailing law of the country on the subject, in the peculiar circumstances of this case, I feel no hesitation, keeping in view the conduct of the accused, that they deserve no leniency (11).

Similarly, in the State vs Shafqat Masih and Mst. Shagufta Kousar (2014), the presiding sessions judge quotes Quranic verses and narrations from prophetic tradition for over five pages to establish the offence of the accused and sentence both of them to death for insulting the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. Furthermore, there are a number of cases in which the judges have relied upon the Quranic and Hadith material to convict the accused, even in the absence of convincing legal evidence against them. In such instances, the judges have often relied upon the following excerpt from an earlier judgment by a High Court judge to by-pass the necessity of reproducing the evidence against the accused in court and to convict her/him on the basis of the religious arguments alone:

To constitute offence under section 295-C, PPC (Pakistan Penal Code) number witnesses are not required and it is not necessary that such abusive language should be made loudly in public or in a meeting or at some specific place, but statement of single witness that somebody had made utterance for the contempt of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon Him) even inside the house is sufficient to award death penalty to such contemnor (Haji Bashir Ahmad vs The State 2005).

Thus, in the absence of the requirement for evidence, religious sources are used both as the logic and the content of the evidence to convict and punish people accused of blasphemy inside the courts. On the other hand, the legal discourse is also used by judges (often of higher courts) to contest the dominant interpretations and offer alternative religious sources. For example, in a 2002 judgement (Muhammad Mahboob alias Booba vs The State), which is widely quoted in later judgements related to blasphemy, the Lahore High Court judge gave his own interpretation of blasphemy as follows:

The greatest blasphemy of all is a child going hungry, a child condemned to the slow death of starvation. The miscarriage of justice is blasphemy. Misgovernment is blasphemy. An unconscionable gap between rich and poor is blasphemy. Denial of

treatment to the sick, denial of education to the child, are alike examples of blasphemy.

In a more recent judgement (February 2017), the Lahore High Court asserted the need to adopt an attitude of forgiveness and mercy as followers of Prophet Muhammad in these words:

Increase in the number of registration [sic] of blasphemy cases and element of mischief involved therein calls for extra care at the end of the prosecution. Registration of such like cases cannot be allowed in a free and careless manner and ordinary citizens, who have not much knowledge of religion, must not be allowed to use the law in question to settle their scores. All this we are doing in the name of our Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), who is “*Rehmatu-lil-Aalmeen*” (mercy for all the worlds) and being “*Bashir*” (one who brings good news) has given assurance that even if whole of life one spent in sins, but before a person breathes his last, has recited “*Kalma Pak*” (declaration of faith), is entitled to be relieved from all his sins by Allah Almighty on the day of judgment (Muhammad Ishaq vs The State 2017, 19).

Hence, references to religious sources are used not only to convict the accused but also to make opposing arguments. The alternate interpretations may also become precedents that are called upon in future judgements. However, appealing to religious sources even in the most progressive of judgements may also set precedents that justify non-state punishments of blasphemers. I have already mentioned the Supreme Court judgement in the case of Mumtaz Qadri vs the State (2015) in which the judges argued that Qadri was not justified in taking ‘the law’ into his own hands. This judgement is seen as one of the most ‘progressive’ judgements to come out of the courts of Pakistan on the matter of non-state killing of blasphemers as it upheld the death penalty for Mumtaz Qadri. However, even in this judgement, the judges allowed for the possibility of a legitimate killing of a blasphemer by non-state actors. I will quote from the judgement at some length to illustrate this point.

We as Muslims are fully aware and convinced of the most exalted position held by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the eyes of Almighty Allah as well as in the hearts and minds of the Ummah and the followers of the Islamic faith. It goes without saying that deepest respect and profound reverence for the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is an article of faith with all of us. Be that as it may the issue involved in this case is not as to whether anybody is allowed to commit blasphemy by defiling the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or not or as to whether a person committing blasphemy can be killed by another person on his own or not but the real question involved in the present case is as to whether or not a person can be said to be justified in killing another person on his

own on the basis of an *unverified impression or an unestablished perception* that such other person has committed blasphemy (emphasis added, 22).

There are two important points to note in the excerpt above. First, the judges had to make a declaration of their own faith and attest to the sanctity of Allah and his Prophet before making their judgement. Second, the judges did not condemn the act of non-state killing of a blasphemer in principle; they only denounced the fact that the said killing was carried out on the basis of *unverified* and *unestablished* evidence. Further in the same judgement, the judges appear to accept the religious sources presented to them by the lawyers with regard to the legality and legitimacy of killing a blasphemer outside the state's laws. The following passage from the judgement demonstrates the judges' position on the said religious sources:

A close and careful examination of all the references made and the religious material produced in this case by the appellant and his learned counsel shows, and shows quite clearly and unmistakably, that such references and material pertain to cases where commission of blasphemy stands established as a fact and then the discussion is about how the apostate may be treated and not a single reference made or instance referred to in the material produced permits killing of a person on the basis only of an unverified impression or an unestablished perception regarding commission of blasphemy (22).

Hence, it is clear that the blasphemer or apostate (words used interchangeably by the judges) *can* be killed by non-state actors if the offence is established. While the judges may have exercised strategic discretion in this case to avoid controversy by dismissing the religious sources submitted to them, they did set a precedent that may be referred to in future judgements on the matter. Moreover, in making their argument that Mumtaz Qadri was not justified in the killing because he did not have sufficient evidence to establish that the offence was committed, they did not simply use the modern legal concepts concerning offence and evidence. They referred to the Quran to assert the correctness of their argument as they wrote,

As mentioned above, in the Holy Qur'an Almighty Allah has repeatedly warned those who start believing in hearsay without getting it ascertained, verified or investigated or conduct themselves on the basis of such hearsay. The appellant, therefore, would have done better if, notwithstanding his professed religious motivation in the matter, he had paid heed to those warnings of Almighty Allah as well before an unjustified killing of another on the sole basis of hearsay. An unjustified killing of a human being has been declared by Almighty Allah as murder of the entire mankind (22-23).

Here we see the judges offering their own interpretation of a religious source to make their argument—in this case against an individual who killed an alleged blasphemer. As seen in

other cases earlier, the judges engage with the religious sources in multiple ways, accepting some sources, offering their own interpretations on others. Regardless, it is through this discursive reasoning that draws upon the state laws as well as the religious sources that they construct their arguments both in favour of and against the punishment of alleged blasphemers. In doing so, they also set precedents—that may be positive or negative—for future cases. For example, the following passage written by the Supreme Court judges in the *Mumtaz Qadri vs the State* (2015) judgement was recently used by the judges in the case of *Asia Bibi vs the State* (2018):

Commission of blasphemy is abhorrent and immoral besides being a manifestation of intolerance but at the same time a false allegation regarding commission of such an offence is equally detestable besides being culpable. If our religion of Islam comes down heavily upon commission of blasphemy, then Islam is also very tough against those who level false allegations of a crime. It is, therefore, for the State of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to ensure that no innocent person is compelled or constrained to face an investigation or a trial on the basis of false or trumped up allegations regarding commission of such an offence (28).

The above passage was used by the Supreme Court judges in 2018 to acquit Asia Bibi. Thus, in this case we see the judges' intervention led to a positive precedent that maybe drawn upon for future references. However, as noted in earlier cases, the judges in the case of Asia Bibi also made appeals to the popular sentiments to establish legitimacy of their judgement. They started the judgement with the following proclamation,

“I bear witness that there is no God worthy to be worshiped but Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Last Messenger of Allah”. The *Qalimah-e-Shahadat* (profession of faith) as shown above, is deemed to be the essence of Islam and the recitation of which makes us Muslims, is self-explanatory and testifies that there is no God but Allah and our Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the Last Messenger of Allah. It is our declaration of faith in the unseen and belief, to bow down our heads before our Lord Allah, admitting the fact that there is none like Him. The sanctity of our Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is further evident from the *Qalimah-e-Shahadat*, as His name is being read together with Allah, thus ultimate care and great importance should be drawn while taking this Holy name (1).

Once again, the affirmation of faith before deciding in favour of a person accused of blasphemy may very well be a strategic move by the judges to establish their authority and claim legitimacy on the basis of their faith. However, they did not stop there. They went on to refer to not only the religious sources (Quran and Hadith) but also popular narratives that legitimise and glorify the killing of blasphemers outside the state laws. In Chapter 4, I

mentioned a couplet of Muhammad Iqbal—a poet celebrated as the ideological father of Pakistan—used by almost all religious groups campaigning for strict punishment for blasphemers. The couplet talks about the love of Prophet Muhammad as a guaranteed way to command Allah’s ‘pen of destiny’. The Supreme Court judges also referred to the same couplet in their judgement on the case of Asia Bibi. They wrote,

As it is enunciated in the above verse of *Allama* Muhammad Iqbal, a well renowned activist and the ‘Spiritual Father of Pakistan’, from his poem *Jawab-e-Shikwa*, the veneration and adulation of Our Beloved Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is evident and is reckoned as the foundational principle on which the religion Islam is based. There is no denial whatsoever of the fact that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) holds the utmost respect, prestige and dignity amongst the Muslim Ummah and possesses the highest rank and status compared to all Creatures shaped by Allah Almighty, even the Messengers of Allah who came before him (3).

They further referred to the popular narratives concerning Ghazi Ilmuddin, giving credence to the idea of non-state killings of alleged blasphemers. They write,

Reference may be made to an incident which occurred in 1923, when one said person, Rajpal, published a pamphlet/book containing derogatory remarks against Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). A movement was launched by the Muslims of the sub-continent demanding a ban on the book. As a result, in 1927 the British Government was forced to enact a law prohibiting insults aimed at founders and leaders of religious communities, as such, section 295-A was inserted in the Pakistan Penal Code in the year 1927. However, the Muslims were not satisfied with it and one Ghazi Ilm-ud-Din Shaheed succeeded in murdering Rajpal. After the trial, Ilm-ud-Din was convicted and was given death penalty. He is considered by the Muslims to be a great lover of the Prophet (9).

The judges called Ilmuddin a martyr, despite noting that he went against the law of the state at the time to kill an alleged blasphemer. They further affirmed that he is accepted as a hero and a great lover of the Prophet by Muslims. It must be noted that the state at the time—the British rule—is considered less legitimate than the current state of Pakistan in the eyes of the people. So, the judges could have been implying that the act of Ilmuddin was justified in the context of the British rule but not in the present context of Pakistan—an Islamic state. Nevertheless, as already discussed, the proponents of non-state killings of blasphemers do not fully accept the legitimacy of the current state of Pakistan either. Within this context, a reference to Ilmuddin as an accepted lover of the Prophet sends a message to those who use Ilmuddin’s story to carry out similar acts of non-state punishments in the present day that their acts are justified.

Hence, in order to establish their legitimacy and credibility, the judges refer not only to the religious sources (Quran and Hadith) but also to popular narratives concerning non-state punishments of alleged blasphemers. There are clearly external pressures—including threats to their lives—under which the judges operate and decide upon cases of blasphemy. Therefore, their appeal to the religious sources and popular narratives may simply be a tactic to ensure their own safety. The judges may also be doing so to establish themselves as good Muslims and lovers of the Prophet to avert criticism of their judgements as anti-religious. In some instances, the judges may also truly believe in the narratives they are employing and appealing to in their judgements. Nevertheless, the fact that the state judges have to draw upon ideas of popular justice highlights the symbolic power of these narratives. It also reiterates the fact that the state's legal system is not the only source of legality and legitimacy. In fact, the state laws are constantly held accountable to higher sources of morality and justice, and the judges must appeal to those sources of higher morality—religious texts and popular narratives—even when they are deciding in accordance with the state laws. References to state laws are therefore not sufficient in establishing the legitimacy of their decisions. The state, despite its claim to represent Islamic law, does not hold monopoly over the interpretation and implementation of what is thought to be the Islamic law. The 'law of the land' is hence subservient to 'what the law should be', and through their discursive reasoning within their judgements, the judges constantly attempt to reconcile the two. Despite the apparent incongruities, the discourse of judges also demonstrates a continuity between the state laws, religious sources and popular narratives.

Conclusion

In discussing the discourse of the lawyers and the judges in this chapter, I have focussed mainly on the micro-level continuities between different narratives and arguments employed by the lawyers and the judges. However, the implications of my analysis in this chapter must be understood at two different levels: individual and structural. At the individual level, I argue that reason and passion are both present and mutually constitutive in constructing the worldviews and strategic arguments of the lawyers and the judges. I have demonstrated that both groups—lawyers and judges—draw upon multiple sources of legitimacy to establish the legality of their judgements concerning the appropriate punishment of blasphemy. The state laws are therefore not a sufficient source of legitimacy despite the state's claim to represent

the Islamic law. There is in fact a constant dialogue between the ideals of Islamic law—as per various actors in the society—and the existing laws of the state. The lawyers and the judges being at the nexus of the state and the society deal with the dilemmas concerning the appropriate punishment of blasphemers on an everyday basis. Both groups construct meaningful and strategic arguments drawing upon multiple sources of morality and legality within the specific contexts and circumstances of the cases they are dealing with. I argue that the shifting narratives and multiple arguments of the judges and lawyers should not be seen as either solely motivated by their belief systems or entirely tactical in nature. Instead, their arguments provide them with meaning and strategic benefits at the same time. The meaning is not static; rather it is constantly constructed within the specific circumstances and is derived from the process of contestation itself. It is within this process of meaning creation that the strategic arguments are also constructed. Hence, the multiple sources of legitimacy and morality are both means and motives at the same time. Moreover, multiple narratives used by the lawyers and the judges bring reason-based and passion-based arguments together in constructing a coherent worldview.

At the structural level, I argue that the state and the non-state ideals of appropriate punishment of an alleged blasphemer are extensions of each other rather than opposing forces. The state of Pakistan does not only claim to be an Islamic state but is itself an embodiment of the popular narratives concerning religious symbols. I mentioned in Chapter 3 that the Ilmuddin controversy was one of the major events involving mobilisation around religious symbols in the lead up to the creation of Pakistan. I have also mentioned that Jinnah—the main architect of Pakistan—represented Ilmuddin in the British courts, and Muhammad Iqbal—the ideological father of Pakistan—led Ilmuddin’s funeral prayers. The popular narratives glorifying the non-state punishment of alleged blasphemers are therefore embedded within the foundation of Pakistan. The anti-blasphemy laws of Pakistan have further strengthened this foundation within the existing structure of the state. The *foundational* and the *structural* violence of the state of Pakistan is then not very different from the non-state violence against those accused of blasphemy. I argue that the state and the non-state punishments of alleged blasphemers, and their sources of legitimacy, are indeed extensions of each other. From a state-centric perspective, the non-state punishments of blasphemers have often been described as anti-state and delinquent. On the other hand, the modern state has been demonised as the sole culprit of structural and foundational violence. I argue that any useful understanding of

blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan must look at the state and the non-state violence as mutually constitutive.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

Situating the Anti-Blasphemy Violence in Pakistan

I have demonstrated in this thesis that blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan arise from moral anxiety, escalation of inter-personal conflict into collective religious passions, contestation between (and amongst) state and non-state actors over the authority to deliver legitimate punishments, and wider narratives of exclusivity and homogeneity engendered by the state. The violence related to blasphemy accusations is thus produced at multiple levels within the society, ranging from inter-personal relationships to state-policies. Individual and communal sensibilities are cultivated through wider religio-national narratives peddled by the religious leaders, politicians, and governments over time. State policies and narratives, on the other hand, reflect the public concerns with the issue of blasphemy. It is this multiplicity of factors, locales of power, and narratives that enflame blasphemy accusations and related violence in Pakistan.

Blasphemy accusations arise within inter-personal relationships disrupted by perceived transgressions of religio-cultural symbolic boundaries. These symbolic boundaries enthrone specific behaviours with respect to social hierarchies of caste, gender, socio-economic status, religious identity and authority. Micro-transgressions of these symbolic boundaries within everyday interactions can be perceived and framed as blasphemy, but not all transgressions of religious, cultural, and social norms lead to blasphemy accusations. Instead, it is the familiar but vulnerable people against whom an accusation of transgressive behaviour gains public support. The accusers are not only motivated by personal rivalries but also by their concern for displaying and maintaining personal purity. The purity of caste, ancestry, sexual behaviour, and religious identity is central to the imagination and articulation of the offence of transgressive behaviour powerfully labelled as blasphemy. In most instances, several notions of purity are superimposed onto each other in the perception of the offence of blasphemy.

As a nation defined by its religious devotion, the concern for purity is central to the lives of Pakistani Muslims. This concern is inculcated by the imagining of Pakistan as the ‘land of the pure’. While the imagining of an Islamic ideal is central to the national identity, in practice

the ideals of religiosity are embedded within local conceptions of purity. Thus, the transgression of local ideals of purity is deemed morally deviant and perceived as religious offence. Moral deviance can be based on religious difference, or other forms of social non-conformity. Hence, it is the moral anxiety concerning individual and communal purity inculcated by the national ideals and lived within the local socio-cultural context that leads to blasphemy accusations. Blasphemy accusations are, therefore, neither a result of purely instrumental motives (as presented by Forte 1994; Gregory 2012; Jahangir and Jilani 2003; Julius 2016 amongst others), nor grounded in a uniquely Islamic ethos (Mahmood 2009). Blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are also not simply a result of exercise of freedom of speech by the accused to criticise religion as proposed by Dobras (2009), Hayee (2012), and A. Khan (2015) amongst others. Instead, this thesis demonstrates that the accusations of blasphemy are motivated by deeply socio-cultural understandings of offence and have both strategic and passionate drivers.

Accusations of blasphemy, however, do not automatically or inevitably lead to violent punishments. A certain congruity has to be established between the immediate offence (that may not be exclusively religious in nature) and broader religious symbols and identities. It is usually the religious leaders who convert the inter-personal conflicts into communal and collective religious issues. The religious leaders are concerned with enhancing their own religious authority and/or the desire to purify their society. They strip the initial accusations of their immediate details and imbue them with wider religious symbolism and meaning. Once the inter-personal dimension of an accusation has been removed and figures of religious authority have established it as a religious offence, the crowds are mobilised against the symbolic figure of the blasphemer who represents the moral threat, the sin, and the evil in the society. Those who form the crowds are driven by their own moral anxieties about collective and national religious identity. The figure of a blasphemer is the impurity that has to be removed to realise the imagined community of ‘the land of the pure’. It is the inherent impossibility of the imagined purity of the religio-national identity that further flames the passions against the alleged blasphemer.

Ordinary Muslims who participate in violence are inspired by the dominant religious discourse that presents love for the Prophet as the key to achieving religious ranks. Most significantly, it is the discourse of Sunni Barelwi religious scholars who present love for the

Prophet and ability to defend his honour as central to Muslims' identity. Loving the Prophet is understood as the only way to salvation by Muslims who are living with the guilt of being sinful Muslims. The religious discourse assures them that they will be absolved of their sins if they demonstrate passionate love for the Prophet. The passionate love for the Prophet is imagined in terms of physical reverence and bodily performances. This discourse glorifies the acts of killing and/or getting killed for the Prophet as the highest form of attachment to the Prophet. Hence, it is the ordinary Muslims living with a sense of guilt and insufficiency—a modern condition—who respond to the calls for defending the honour of the Prophet.

Nevertheless, despite the threat of the alleged blasphemer to the collective identity, and despite the glorification of the act of killing a blasphemer, the implementation of violent punishment is contingent upon the decisions of many other actors. The local powerholders, police, government officials, NGOs, and media all play their role in determining whether an accusation will lead to violent punishment of the blasphemer or not. These actors also have their own strategic and emotional interests in the issue. It is a culmination of decisions made by multiple actors with complex motivations that leads to anti-blasphemy violence. This thesis demonstrates the significance of religious leaders and other key actors (Brass 2003), symbolic resources and meta narratives (Das 1990; Tambiah 1996), roused passions (Blom and Jaoul 2008; Kakar 1990), and anxieties about identity (Sidel 2006) in the making of violence.

The violent punishment of the alleged blasphemers, however, can be carried out by both state or non-state actors, both claiming to represent the sovereign will of Allah. The existing anti-blasphemy legislature of the state of Pakistan claims to represent Islamic law and popular sentiments by prescribing punishments for those accused of blasphemy. However, owing to the perceived ineffectiveness of the state's legal system in delivering abrupt and harsh punishments, and the perceived corruption of the ruling elite, the public do not always accept the state's right to deliver punishments. The alleged blasphemers can therefore be punished by non-state actors who thus contest the state's claim to monopoly over legitimate violence. A state of dispersed authority and multiple sovereignties is thus created (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Hansen 2005; Hansen and Stepputat 2006). This is best understood as a situation of legal pluralism (Benda-Beckmann 2009; Fitzpatrick 1983; Griffiths 1986; Pirie 2013) in which the multiple systems of moral regulation do not only contest but also co-opt

each other. The state and the non-state punishments of blasphemers thus draw upon the same sources of legitimacy embedded in the dominant religious discourse and narratives of popular justice.

Within this context, the religious leaders, politicians, and government officials compete with each other to claim their own authority through support for the violent punishment of alleged blasphemers. The religious leaders cum politicians have been at the forefront of campaigns to present the problem of blasphemy as an existential issue for the identity of Pakistan, an avowed Islamic state. Consequently, every politician—religious or secular, conservative or progressive—has to deal with the question of blasphemy in one way or the other. It is clear from numerous cases that supporting punishment for alleged blasphemers helps politicians, other public figures, and even state judges gain legitimacy and authority. It is no wonder that successive governments of Pakistan have spearheaded anti-blasphemy campaigns not only at national but also at the international level, in their efforts to establish themselves as the true guardians of Islam who protect the honour of the Prophet Muhammad.

The political battles over the issue of blasphemy are enabled by the very foundation of the state of Pakistan upon an exclusivist narrative. By claiming to represent the Muslims of South Asia, the will of Allah, and Islamic law, the state has opened up space for the contestation of what these terms mean. The state's attempts to define these terms to achieve a homogenous, uniform Muslim community have rather produced competing claims and widespread anxieties amongst the people. Within this context, blasphemy becomes one amongst many expressions of deep concern for the religio-political identity of Pakistan. The competing religio-political narratives about the identity of Pakistan have established the issue of blasphemy as an indispensable focus for the state and anyone else vying for state power. This contestation engenders more anxieties among common people who then engage in blasphemy accusations and violence against those who fall out of line and do not conform to their idealised standards of religiosity and purity. Hence, anti-blasphemy violence is produced at the individual, communal, and national levels interconnected in a complex network of mutually enforcing narratives, ideals, and practices. The pervasiveness of the concern for blasphemy is a consequence of interrelated processes of self-making, community-making, and state-making.

This study of blasphemy in Pakistan offers insights for broader questions of violence and moral conflict in societies. In particular, I contribute to the discussion in the anthropology of

violence (e.g., Blom and Jaoul 2008; Das 1990; Hinton 2002; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Schinkel 2013; Sidel 2006; Tambiah 1996) and in the field of legal pluralism (e.g., Benda-Beckmann 2009; Fitzpatrick 1983; Griffiths 1986; Pirie 2013; Rouland and Planel 1994, Tamanaha 2001). Anthropologists of violence have been mostly concerned with the violence inherent to the states and other imperialist forces (structural violence), motivations of the actors (subjective violence), and the cultural idioms and symbolic resources that both the immediate agents of violence and the institutions of power draw upon. This thesis contributes to this body of literature by providing ethnographic examples of how the subjective and the structural forms of violence are enmeshed and how various systems of meaning (religion, culture, nationalism) offer symbolic resources to the production of violence. I suggest that we look at these systems of meaning as inter-connected and mutually reinforcing instead of separate categories. Thus, instead of asking whether a particular instance of violence is religious, cultural, or a result of modern nationalism, we should understand it as grounded in a complex, multi-layered system of meaning in which religion, culture, and nationalism are not separable from each other.

The field of legal pluralism has been concerned with the possibilities of the co-existence of multiple systems of moral regulation and legality in societies. My thesis contributes to this body of literature by providing an example of not only co-existence but also simultaneous contestation and co-optation of multiple systems of morality and justice. Moreover, my study highlights that multiple systems of legality (traditional or indigenous systems, Western legal system, etc.) are not fixed entities. Instead, as in the case of Pakistan, the traditional and the modern/Western legal systems may influence each other in such a way that they both draw upon same sources and are built upon similar assumptions. By bringing together the theoretical frameworks of anthropology of violence and legal pluralism, this thesis provides an integrative approach to understanding violence and moral conflict in a society. I suggest that we move beyond the dichotomies of emotion/reason, legal/extra-legal, traditional/Western, and cultural/religious to gain a more nuanced understanding of violent conflicts in societies. These dichotomies have dominated the literature for far too long and prevent us from understanding the complexity of motivations and meanings in people's lives.

The Way Forward

My research provides a cross-sectional view of the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan. There is potential to explore each of the various aspects of the problem, touched upon by this thesis, in much greater depth. However, in this section, I do not want to delineate the possible directions for future research on this topic. Instead, I want to offer my personal views on the wider politics of studying blasphemy in Pakistan. As discussed in Chapter 2, this topic is very close to my heart and much more than an academic inquiry to me. I have emotional and political stakes in this issue, and I would like to discuss those to conclude this thesis. Over the course of my research and writing of this thesis, I have grown more hopeless regarding the possibility of decline in blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan. My increasing hopelessness reflects the worsening reality of my country. When I started working on this topic as a Masters' student in 2012, I was pained by the events of 2011—assassinations of Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti for their public support of Asia Bibi. Pakistan had seen protests against Taseer in late 2010, and in support of Qadri—Taseer's killer—in 2011. The situation was precarious. However, the TLP, political party formed by the supporters of Qadri, was yet to emerge on the scene. Over the past few years, I have seen the birth of the TLP in 2015, and its emergence as the fifth most popular political party in the 2018 general elections. I have seen TLP and other parties hold the country hostage over the issue of blasphemy on at least two major occasions, in November 2017 and October 2018. I have seen the governments (and the army) bow down and make concessions to the anti-blasphemy protestors on multiple occasions. I have also seen some of the major incidents of blasphemy-related violence such as the torching of Joseph Colony in Lahore by a mob (2013), the burning of a Christian couple alive (2014), lynching of Mashal Khan on his university campus (2017) unfold in the past few years.

The reason I am recounting the recent events and their emotional impact on me is because I believe it is important to emphasise in conclusion to this thesis that the question of blasphemy is an extremely volatile and constantly evolving issue in Pakistan. Every time I have had to present my research in the past few years, there was something *current* in the news related to the topic of my research. Every time I finished writing a chapter, something major happened, forcing me to go back and incorporate the new developments in my arguments. My thesis-writing period felt more like an ongoing commentary on a political phenomenon that is

constantly changing than a stable academic exercise. Given the volatile nature of the topic of this thesis, my thesis presents a snapshot of an ever-changing phenomenon.

Consequently, it is very difficult to come up with any definitive answers or potential solutions to the problem of blasphemy in Pakistan. Nevertheless, I will briefly outline my personal views on the possible policy directions for future. As Rumi (2018) has already noted, any solution to Pakistan's blasphemy problem must be long term and take both the state narratives and the wider social attitudes into account (334-336). An instant repeal of the anti-blasphemy legislature of Pakistan—as advocated by the human rights activists—would not only be ineffective but would most likely exacerbate the problem by inciting public anger and shutting down the country. Moreover, as my thesis has shown, the blasphemy laws are but one expression of the wider sentiments concerning difference and dissent in Pakistan. Therefore, in my opinion—shared with many other voices in Pakistan—there has to be a long-term redefinition of Pakistan and what it means to be a Muslim in Pakistan. In doing so, the indoctrination of unity, oneness, and homogeneity as the basis of Pakistan's identity needs to be undone. The narrative of Islam as the exclusive reason for the creation of Pakistan will have to be replaced with a more inclusive national ideology. The undoing of indoctrination requires a systematic unlearning of the exclusivist narrative at various levels. The state of Pakistan has potent tools, such as education and media, at its disposal that can be used for a gradual change in the public perception of religio-national identity. However, the willingness of those in power to let go of their immediate political interests to pursue a more just and peaceful country is the most challenging goal to achieve. As the history has shown, and as many academics, activists, and practitioners concerned with Pakistan realise, there is little hope that the politicians will ever put the lives and wellbeing of vulnerable inhabitants of the country over their political gains.

It is not only the politicians and the governments of Pakistan who keep the problem of blasphemy alive. The international community also has a major role to play, albeit *not* what they think is their role to play. The international rhetoric has focussed on the issue of blasphemy as a problem of human rights in Pakistan. This rhetoric is not only West-centric but has also further galvanised the supporters of anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan. For example, after the Supreme Court's decision to acquit Asia Bibi in October 2018, the British Parliament commended the decision in their parliamentary session (*Pakistan Today* 2018b). Not only did the British parliament deem it necessary to discuss the matter in their session,

the video of the session was also made public. The video of the British parliamentarians commending the acquittal of Asia Bibi was widely circulated on social media by the protestors in Pakistan who took the video as the proof that the West is trying to undermine Islam and that the Supreme Court judges were playing into the hands of the foreign forces of evil. This is just one example, but such seemingly well-intentioned gestures by the foreign governments further feed into the fears of the Pakistani Muslims and their anxieties concerning their religio-national identity. I understand that global politics is complex and politicians in each country are also pursuing their respective political agendas, but I feel that any conversation about the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan must also involve the impact of the global political narratives on the situation. In the global world, where information travels fast and has ripple effects elsewhere, the international community should be cautious not to enhance polarisations around the world.

The politicians are not the only ones responsible for widening gaps and worsening polarisation across the globe. Even the leftist movements in the West, for example those speaking up against Islamophobia and *for* the Muslims in the Western contexts, can have unintended negative effects in Muslim-majority countries. The popularisation of the concept of *Islamophobia*—a term frequently used by my research participants who supported anti-blasphemy violence—reinforces the sentiment of “Islam under threat” for Muslims even in Muslim-majority countries. Of course, the power relations in countries like Pakistan are quite different to the Western countries where Muslims are a minority, but the global transfer of ideas means that the concept of Islamophobia is used to justify violence against the non-Muslim minorities or *deviant* Muslims within Pakistan. My research participants constantly positioned themselves with respect to what is happening in the West, complaining that Muslims’ sentiments are not recognised, and arguing that the West aims to undermine Islam while protecting their own cultural sensitivities through the laws of hate speech. Within this context, even academic studies—such as that of Saba Mahmood (2009) and Talal Asad (2009)—end up giving credence to the professed moral injury of Muslims, which may be detrimental to the vulnerable in countries like Pakistan. Therefore, I suggest that instead of using polarising language (of Islamophobia or Muslims’ moral injury), academic as well as non-academic discourse should focus on peculiar power-relations within specific contexts.

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Appendix: Text of Offences Relating to Religion (Pakistan Penal Code, 1860)

295 Injuring or defiling place of worship, with Intent to insult the religion of any class:

Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction damage or defilement as an insult to their religion. shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

295-A Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting Its religion or religious beliefs:

Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the 'religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Pakistan, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, or with fine, or with both.

295-B Defiling, etc., of copy of Holy Quran:

Whoever will fully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran or of an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable for imprisonment for life.

295-C Use of derogatory remarks, etc.; in respect of the Holy Prophet:

Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

298-A Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages:

Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly defiles a sacred name of any wife (Ummul Mumineen), or members of the family (Ahle-bait), of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), or any of the righteous caliphs (Khulafa-e-Rashideen) or companions (Sahaaba) of the Holy Prophet description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

298-B Misuse of epithet, descriptions and titles, etc. Reserved for certain holy personages or places:

1. Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation:

a. Refers to or addresses, any person, other than a Caliph or companion of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), as "Ameerul Momneen", "Khalifat-ul-Momneen", "Khalifat-ul-Muslimeen", "Sahaabi" or "Razi Allah Anho";

b. Refers to or addresses, any person, other than a wife of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), as Ummul-Mumineen;

c. refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a member of the family (Ahle-Bait) of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), as Ahle-Bait; or

d. refers to, or names, or calls, his place of worship as Masjid shall be punished with imprisonment or either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine.

2. Any person of the Qadiani group or Lahore group, (who call themselves Ahmadis or by any other names), who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, refers to the mode or from of call to prayers followed by his faith as "Azan" or recites Azan as used by the Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

298-C Persons of Qadiani group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith:

Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis or any other name), who directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.